

1 VGV94 12/09/2022 Shannon Michael Ross

2 D: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? What is your age?

3 S: Yeah, I am 38 currently. Honestly as I said that I had to think because I genuinely
4 forget my age sometimes. I think that's a good thing maybe. Yeah, so I mean, in terms to
5 going a little bit about myself as well?

6 D: What race are you?

7 S: I am biracial. I don't ever choose one or the other, but I'm mixed Black and white.

8 D: Okay. And what gender are you?

9 S: Male.

10 D: What neighborhood do you currently live in?

11 S: [Uptown neighborhood]

12 D: Okay, Uptown. How long have you lived there?

13 S: Well, hard to answer that clearly. I have technically, I've lived here for about 4 months
14 now, but my family's been here for 20 some years and so I could kind of say, we've been
15 over here for about 23, 24 years.

16 D: Okay. So that's your neighborhood.

17 S: Yeah, it's where I grew up at. Yup.

18 D: Okay. Tell me about your story. What happened?

19 S: Actually 30 years, I just thought about that. Its closer to 30, 31 years. Wow. So, my
20 story. I guess going back to, being on [Uptown neighborhood]. Growing up here from the
21 age of first grade maybe on, I remember taking the bus to Lloyd Street down North
22 Avenue. So, I have been here at least that long since elementary school. You know,
23 growing up biracial and white presenting, I was always the white kid in Black city

24 schools and Black summer camps and Black neighborhood for most of my life. When I
25 would go anywhere that was more predominantly white, you know I was suddenly the
26 Black kid which was always really interesting. It was a very different dynamic no matter
27 where I go. I can't just be what I am, which is biracial. I am always chosen as one. And
28 over time, it took a while in a very difficult path to get there but I'm very much
29 embracing of that lack of belonging to one area. It allows me to belong to everyone in a
30 sense. But at the time that really was a struggle for me. I wouldn't say I was bullied you
31 know. I was picked on no more than the average kid I would say, but these are the things
32 that I was picked on for was being the white in a Black area, being called "gay" or "pretty
33 faced" or whatever because of just how I looked. There was no actual reason for these
34 things. Those were the jokes that came up because of how I looked. Chip on my shoulder
35 grew, and I just got into a sense that I had something to prove to myself more than
36 anybody else. Because of the way I responded to the average, I would like to call it the
37 average amount to be picked on. I don't think, again, that I was picked on or bullied any
38 more than somebody else. I just got a chip on my shoulder about it, and as time went on
39 and got into high school, never really had any encounters to "prove" my manhood in the
40 miseducation of manhood sense that we have acquired in neighborhoods like I grew up
41 at. It could be called "the ghetto." I wouldn't call it "the ghetto." It's more like "hood
42 adjacent" because you have some blocks, like the block I grew up on was not bad, but all
43 around me is areas that are just as much the hood as you would think as anywhere else in
44 the city. So, there's pockets of really nice and then there's pockets of okay, and there's
45 pockets of really bad. Where I grew up at it's very Milwaukee type of area in that sense,
46 and so the chip on my shoulder grew. As I got older and had more opportunities to be

47 offended and feel like I had something to prove and then acquire means to do something
48 about it. The one night that came to a head, and somebody had robbed me a long time
49 ago. We just had an encounter, and I ended up taking his life in an incredibly, I think
50 immature is the simplistic way to put it, because it was. It was massively just me acting
51 out in a way an immature child does, not having a concept of emotional intelligence and
52 the respect for everyone's journeys, and this response was way over the top in so many
53 ways. That was just how we did things, growing up. It's something that as crazy as it
54 sounds when people, when I came out of prison years later, heard about what happened
55 and knew about it, their response to me was not one of, "Oh my God you did this terrible
56 thing, you went to prison." It was, "Oh, I understand that." Because, people would
57 grapple with the acceptability of taking a life. And so it's really absurd how it is, but that
58 was a response that I saw and that's also a part of why I felt it made sense to do that type
59 of a thing. Because that's what you do when someone robs you. It's just that silly. Raised
60 on a lot of rap music, raised on a lot of, again this mis-education of manhood and these
61 popular tropes about how you are supposed to respond in certain situations and you know
62 very American mores towards things that led me to that decision and that belief that it
63 made sense. That was where my life and a life of those who I impacted greatly with that
64 decision started to take a very strong turn in different directions. From that point on it
65 was just figuring out what I did wrong and what went wrong within my mind to go from
66 being really all around not a violent child at all, not at all someone who acted out in ways
67 that were just so rebellious. I mean, I acted out as much as I think any regular boy did but
68 nothing to that extent that made sense to suddenly take a life and have a prison sentence
69 of 17 years. I had to figure that out. What is it that went that wrong in my life, in my

70 decision making, in my soul that this is the path that I chose? It just became a very, very,
71 different journey from then on that I had experienced in my life. I don't know if I should
72 stop there because that was kind of like where my story starts at more so, rather than what
73 my story was.

74 D: When you said that, you mentioned the misunderstanding of manhood and that you
75 had been bullied. When you ran into the person who had robbed you, what were you
76 feeling? Did he, threaten you or, I mean how could it have been avoided that night?

77 S: So, we had a couple encounters since then. And I was again, this all ties into how, it
78 allows me to know that people who commit very violent crimes when they are young or
79 do things that seem so out of bounds, that humanity can come back to a very, very stable
80 place of humanity. That it doesn't represent their potential of who they really are at heart.
81 Sometimes we look at what these youth do, and we see you know these awful things and
82 we are like, "Oh my god, that person is a monster. They should be locked up forever."
83 But it's so much more complex than that. And so, at the time in my mind I was actually,
84 felt justified in keeping tabs on who this individual was over time. It wasn't like a dogged
85 hunt, but it was just more like, "He is in this area." "He is in that area." Like I had a plot
86 of already getting this person back from the very beginning. It wasn't even like things
87 happened afterwards that escalated to a point where this occurred. It was more things
88 happened in-between the time that he robbed me and the encounter with me and him that
89 night that in my mind made it more justified. But I had already made that decision
90 because I was just that caught up and believing it had to happen. The times where we
91 encountered each other in between there wasn't threats so much there was more
92 antagonism. There was more poking rather than anything that was a sense of, "I had to do

93 this because this person was coming for me.” There was never that at all. It was just all in
94 my mind a sense of duty, ridiculous and as insane as it sounds, that this had to happen
95 after somebody robs you. The night of the event I felt fear, absolute fear. There was no
96 sense of excitement or “Oh, this is going to be finally he gets what he has coming.” It was
97 just in my mind I had told myself, “This is what is going to happen,” and if I didn’t do
98 that, “Who am I?” I am almost- I am what everyone kind of said in those times they
99 would, the bullying sense that I had. I was doing it simply out of a sense of responsibility
100 to my own self esteem rather than any belief whatsoever based off of emotion or anger or
101 rash bloodlust in the moment, which it would make more sense. There wasn’t even that
102 involved in it. It wasn’t even threats.

103 D: How old were you then?

104 S: I was 19 at the time, I was 18 when the incident happened and 19 when the night of the
105 event, when I took his life.

106 D: What area where you in?

107 S: Oh, what area of the city?

108 D: Yeah, of the city, I’m sorry.

109 S: I was living over here where I am at but none of this happened over where I am at. It
110 was not far but it was not right here. It was in, around [Uptown neighborhood].

111 D: Okay, great. How has this experience affected you?

112 S: It has had a different impact on me than I think people expect or would want
113 sometimes. It’s very interesting, on the one hand I have never been the type to look back
114 and have a very extremely guilt-ridden approach towards anything. I don’t know why that
115 is. I think part of it is natural and part of it is also I have a reason for it. Whatever causes

116 that, I've been somebody that always moves forward with whatever happened. As
117 effectively as I can instead of letting things tear me down because I have to still exist in
118 this world. And I have value to offer and that can't be offered to anyone or society if I'm
119 always living in this sense of how terrible I was at one point of my life. And so, the way
120 that it has changed my life and it has changed the course of other people's lives as well
121 because of how it's changed my life has been of how dogged I have become about being
122 a force in between kids doing what I did and people who come out from prison, where I
123 was for 17 years. Going back. And so it's been this remarkable energy for me to invest so
124 much of my time in a very unhealthy way as I am told constantly about how much I work
125 in this space and on these projects that I have. But to stop, to cease from causing what I
126 caused in other people. Whether they be adults that were in prison or kids that might go
127 towards that, and that touches on some of the projects that I am really involved in now
128 and leading. It's been ultimately this summary of that. It's changed my life in a way that
129 the entire concept I have of life and of human beings who I call my family. Drawing my
130 family so much larger than I used to at one point. My family was just the people that I
131 was really close to and those would probably be honestly when I was younger, just a
132 couple friends that I really felt a love for and a closeness to. I didn't even have a real
133 closeness with my own actual blood family and so going from that to now having like
134 everyone that exists is my family. I've gone from only three or so from the people that I
135 was close to, to now the people that are now closest to me aren't even the closest to me.
136 Because, and that could be frustrating, I see everybody as family. I see, for example, I
137 have a son right now and I can't feel safe or secure or feel like he is healthy until
138 everyone else's sons and daughters are healthy and safe and secure. Because if I knowing

139 that there are other youth out there just as messed up as I was in the way they view the
140 world in this sense of duty and this sense of what has to happen. In the emotional
141 rationalization we have about the actions that we take, and they can just do to my son
142 what I did to somebody else's if I am not able to get in between that and show youth or
143 adults or whoever else that it's such a far distance from the reality that you are actually
144 living. That's based off of lies that you've been told and things you are telling yourself
145 and that's your emotions building up inside you. It's turned me into a very different
146 person and the energy that I had at one point in my life for various things that were a mix
147 of unproductive and irrelevant are now almost entirely focused on community work and
148 how I can, can't reverse, but address and make up for tenfold what I caused years ago as
149 the undercurrent of how it's changed me.

150 D: That was beautiful. I like how you said that I have to ask this question. How can you
151 help change the mentality, or I want to say, "The sense of duty" mentality?

152 S: Yeah, that is a very weighty question and that is what we grapple with all the time. I
153 know, we, when I say we, me and Adam Procell, who you'll be talking to next week. We
154 have a project we just got some money for support from other organizations to build a
155 comprehensive program for the very youth that we were at one point. Adam himself went
156 to prison at 15 for gang related homicide and so at that point I've had people ask me,
157 "What could of somebody said to you when you were younger from keeping you from
158 going in?" You couldn't have said anything to me. That's the entire point. The concept
159 that we have of being able to talk to some of these kids is, I think we are already losing it
160 for thinking that just conversation is the solution point. You have to be able to take kids
161 out when they reach that point, that it's too late. Give them that last, "This is the last stop

162 off of this train before it takes you either yourself to death or to a life in prison or some
163 other variation of that. That's just an awful future for you." What we are going to be
164 doing is taking kids out of the environment of Milwaukee who are considered the highest
165 risk of committing or being the result of a homicide episode. To not make that sound as
166 goofy and complex as I just did, to either dying or killing somebody. If we could get
167 them out of their environment for seven days and then have a very comprehensive plan
168 for them when they come back with all types of touch points and opportunities. To
169 leverage that seven-day period where we were really able to pour into them with all types
170 of love and resources and role models and peer support and all these different activities to
171 show them that they could tap into their adrenaline in a different way. Then, that would
172 be in my opinion, the best way sometimes to get people outside of that "sense of duty"
173 because you can't talk somebody out of an ideology. You have to, they have to have an
174 experience, they have to have something that happens. Whether just life, life happens and
175 changes them, or you fabricate it and create an environment, and a program or an event or
176 experience that really opens them up and wakes them up. Because it's a matter of being
177 shaken. They're hypnotized. I was hypnotized. Something had to shake me out of that,
178 something, strong collision or some very powerful experience. We don't want that have
179 to be prison; we don't want that to have to be engaging in a violent encounter to then
180 figure it out. We want to prevent that. So you have to get kids out of their environment.
181 You have to immerse them in a different lifestyle so they can focus on what you are
182 saying. Because at that point then the words then the conversation becomes valid, and it
183 can connect. That is the approach we are taking. That's the belief I have, and that's what I
184 think if anything would of worked for me, and Adam feels the same way, and I know

185 many others that went to prison who are these very kids, were their future if they don't
186 get off these trains, it would have been being removed from the exact toxic environment
187 that caused us to think that "sense of duty" made sense.

188 D: That makes a lot of sense. And this is only a suggestion; but if you wanted, I do have
189 the contact information for the Black Cowboys Ranch out in Sussex.

190 A: I hadn't even heard of that, yeah. That's very cool, I would definitely like to know
191 about that. We, in a very interesting turn of things in me and Adam's life, as crazy as it's
192 been, Tommy Thompson's daughter Kelly Thompson has become a big supporter and
193 friend of ours and she's has allowed us to, or I guess I should say, facilitated us getting
194 access to their cabin and farm for the retreat. So, the very person who is synonymous
195 often times with mass incarceration in Wisconsin, the incarceration of a lot of Black men,
196 which got us this infamous moniker is having the highest incarceration rate for Black
197 men in the country per capita. His real estate, his property will now be the place where
198 we hopefully can save Black and Brown youth from ever going into that system.

199 D: Isn't that something?

200 S: Yeah, it's really crazy.

201 D: [...]

202 S: It is crazy. We never to cease to be amazed by that aspect of it and so many other
203 opportunities we've been given. From coming from what we have done negatively to
204 society and to be able to be given these chances and listened to as a point of solutions and
205 addressing. We are never not awed and grateful and humbled by where things are going
206 in that way.

207 D: Even if you may have been fearful or nervous about it, you still proceeded and you
208 stepped into your purpose. And because of that, that is why all of this is going to happen
209 and continue to happen.

210 S: I think so.

211 D: Yeah, I think so too. So, how did this affect your family?

212 S: Yeah, that's something. I never really had a strong conversation with my mom about
213 how it impacted her. I just seen it. We've had enough conversations that I gleaned as
214 much as I am willing to know. I mean, that sounds really selfish, but I also feel like I
215 don't want to put her through it again to have a conversation about it. Because when I
216 was incarcerated, we never had a good relationship growing up when I was an adolescent.
217 It wasn't until I went to prison that I really was interested in connecting with my family.
218 That's how it happens. You go through something really traumatic and people that you
219 may have taken for granted or never really were looking at, at the time because life was
220 or your mind was so chaotic. You start to see then everything starts to clear again like,
221 "Oh, yeah you've been here all the time" or "You're much more complex than I might of
222 thought." And so, that relationship got strong when I was inside, and we talked about a
223 lot of things. She would tell me stories of where she was at times, the day I got arrested.
224 It was very clear to me how much that affected her and my father. But we've never dove
225 into super details about it because it just doesn't seem productive to go through, to relive.
226 I get the lesson very powerfully of what it caused her, and I feel that. It's weird, I am a
227 very argumentative person and I've changed from being argumentative towards people to
228 being argumentative towards systems. Like, I won't stop arguing with a stupid policy or
229 stupid system. That doesn't mean that I have to argue with people. I can find different

230 ways to argue with a problem, rather than being vocal and antagonistic towards the
231 individuals that are involved. I can put my energy differently into an argument if that
232 makes any sense. Arguments aren't always vocal is all I'm saying. What I do now with
233 my mom is that I made this commitment a long time ago, is to never be in contention
234 with her against, even if it's something I disagree with, I am only going to be in
235 contention alongside her towards whatever it is that is her problem. But I don't want to,
236 I've caused her too much pain and she's far, I can't think of enough words to explain how
237 incredibly wonderful a person that she is and a mother and not at all an indication of what
238 I had did. It was not to blame the parent in the situation but it's something that I just have
239 taken such a different turn in the way that I approach people and especially my
240 relationship with her because of how much I saw that my actions impacted somebody that
241 I had come to, didn't at the time, but very quickly after being arrested and convicted,
242 came to value as the most important person in my life. I don't know if that will ever
243 change because she is just such a good person that I can't ever be more, I guess, can't
244 speak enough about who she is and what she has done in my life. That simple
245 relationship has expanded upon the way that I have relationships with other people
246 because I know the impact that I could have on somebody in such a negative way with
247 my actions and I don't want to do that ever again.

248 D: Wow, how old was the victim?

249 S: Same age. We were both 17-18.

250 D: What was his nationality or his race?

251 S: He was Black.

252 D: And you said, he, so he was a male?

253 S: Yes.

254 D: How do you think this affected his family?

255 S: I mean, I have a fair indication on that. I had a couple touch points in my life to his
256 family. His family was a mix of, I know the mother was very distraught. The mother had
257 lost another son of hers, not too far before this son and just street life stuff. You grow up
258 in that miseducation, again of manhood is what I call it, is what I think causes a lot of the
259 other ills that are in the community that we look at as separate, but I think a lot of it
260 comes from that similar way that we raise men and all that spans of into these terrible
261 ripple effects. She was at the sentencing and did not speak when I was sentenced, but it
262 was pretty clear that this had a terrible impact on her because you lose two of your kids.
263 How does that impact on how you view life, fairness, God, faith, and your own capacity.
264 It just tears you down in so many different ways. I have never spoken to her, and I never
265 have been able to. I wrote a letter when I was inside for the Victim Impact Services, an
266 apology letter that if she were to ever reach out, it would be there for her. But I know the
267 family, it just, it also makes it even tougher because in his family there was comments
268 made about, "Oh," the same thing that I heard, like, "That's the lifestyle. You're out there
269 robbing people. That's going to happen." How does that even make it worse for the
270 mother to hear, there's not even a level of sympathy for him losing his life from his own
271 family. I can only imagine that this from various ways how that turned out and the
272 comments that I heard that it was very, very difficult to say the least, to move on. If
273 nothing else, I have a son now and I don't know how many times I have thought of him
274 dying because that's all it seems like at this stage. He's 13 months. Like all I am ever
275 doing is keeping him from killing himself. Because everything he is trying to do is bite

276 something that he shouldn't be biting or climbing something and falling over something
277 that he shouldn't be or in my hands trying to wiggle and get out or get out of someone
278 else's. I am constantly mortified of him losing his life and so that created a new sense of
279 understanding of what it feels like to lose a child. I can't, no one can say they know if
280 you haven't been through that, but just imagining from the things that I have in my life
281 and the things I've heard and seen, it's just devastating is the only thing I could think of.

282 D: How do you think this has affected the community?

283 S: I don't even know if it has. That's the crazy thing in Milwaukee. We're dealing with
284 worse now than we were when I went in. We've had a record for homicide this year I
285 believe in this city, something like that. It can't have affected the community, logically
286 speaking, you can't think it has affected the community that much if we are worse off.
287 And that's just one sense in terms of affected them in a sense of, I guess let me start over.
288 I am reevaluating my answer and it doesn't make any sense. If we are this much worse
289 off then things that we were doing back then were clearly getting us to this point, right?
290 So if we, back when I was in and the people that were committing those types of crimes
291 when I was younger were doing that, it's somewhat of a snowball effect, to get to where
292 we are now. I can say that area in specifically, I don't have any feedback from that
293 neighborhood. That was not a violent neighborhood. It wasn't a bad neighborhood at all.
294 It was kind of a one off in that area I would imagine. The community as a whole sees
295 these things and there is this sense of fear that kicks in, of people moving, people that
296 have the means to help the city going to different states. It just compiles these
297 foundational components of a strong society and a community going away when you
298 have these types of incidents that occur. It's just tough. I have never been asked that

300 question., I have thought about it, but that's one that I could only really imagine on based
301 of where we are now and how I feel in my neighborhood right now when I come back
302 and know about how car jackings and homicide rates are right now. I am trying to park
303 my car in my garage, looking everywhere and I am always concerned. So it's just that
304 lack of safety that you have and that lower quality of life overall that I contributed to.

305 D: What can we do to lower or eliminate gun violence?

306 S: It's a variety of things, I mean at its root, these things come from structural
307 mechanisms upon which the community is built in terms of housing and employment,
308 and segregation in Milwaukee is notorious for that, which ties obviously into racism.
309 There's these aspects that are below any simple thing that we can do as a program or
310 coming together, but there are a variety of things that we can do both in the immediate
311 and long term. The immediate is as simple as meet your neighbors. If you just get up, I
312 know there's a lot of "defund the police" and in the work that I do, "abolition" is spoken
313 about a lot. Those two things that are kind of laughed at by people that are looking at the
314 crime rates like, "Oh, how are we going to defund the police. Like there are all these
315 murders or this violence going on and crime. Who is going to stop that?" It's not so much
316 that you have to take away the police or you have to take these systems away or let
317 everyone out of prison. That's where the abolition is thought of as a lot. The simplest
318 thing to do in these states is meet the people that you live by. Get to know the individuals
319 that if you need something are going to be able to provide that and give them that
320 motivation to by meeting them. On the other side you will have a motivation to help them
321 if they're in need and that simple act will solve a lot of things because you are creating a
larger understanding of family just from getting to know your neighbors. Because the

322 smaller that we think our family is, the easier it is to cause violence, to engage in
323 violence, to hate, which is the seed of so much bad that happens in anyone's life because
324 you have to hate something before you can do something violent to it usually. That's the
325 simplest thing to do. Long term, the way we engage with community organizations, the
326 way we get involved in things, the way we vote, those are all the long-term solutions that
327 I think have always been the same. But I think the one difference though is, until we start
328 to really get to know the people around us and think about our family is larger than just
329 those that are blood or those that are in our household, we are going to continue have
330 these issues in politics and in voting and in the ways we spend our money, the way we
331 invest our time. Because we are only going to focus on things that help the people closest
332 to us instead of understanding what happens in a different neighborhood is happening in
333 my neighborhood. It's going to come back at some point, it's going to affect my
334 neighborhood somebody that I know or myself is going to go to that neighborhood at
335 some point for some reason, and it all touches. It all connects. You have to have a greater
336 respect for the massive feature of society that is what a family consists of instead of just
337 the people that you want to talk to or you feel you have to because of blood within your
338 house. I'd say meet your neighbors is the easiest answer that I could give to that.

339 D: I like that, that should become a slogan. "Increase your family." You know, maybe
340 this should be a word in between, but basically, "Increase your family."

341 S: No, right.

342 D: I like that. That's great. What would you like to say to our elected officials?

343 S: "Be comfortable with losing your job. If you have the fear of, or if you get into the job
344 because." Let me restate that. "If you get into the job because you think it's a job just like

345 any other person getting a job for money, then you're probably the wrong person to have
346 that job and I don't think anything I say to you matter anyways because you are looking
347 at it as a come up. But if you are in that role and you are sincere and that sense starts to
348 kick in of, 'Oh no, they might vote me out,' then you're probably not being guided by the
349 right concerns because you should be guided by what is best for the community," and a
350 lot of times there are going to be things that people don't understand is best for them
351 because people are led by fear. They're controlled by that same issue that leads to
352 violence is the same issue that leads to poor voting, leads to the way we spend money on
353 things that are ridiculous when we have so many other things that are in need of money
354 and investment that would really get us to where we want to not have the same violence.
355 We complain about things we cause over and over again in society and so, I think that
356 belief and that ideology of behaving in your job in a sense that keeps you in office is the
357 worst possible thing you could do. I can't say any one policy to pursue, I think that's
358 always situational but when you are guided by what's best for the community as a leader
359 instead of what's going to keep you in office you know what are the loudest voices
360 sometimes saying because the loudest voices aren't always the ones, you know, a piggy
361 bank, this is a quote from Shark Tank, but I think it applies in a lot of areas in life, "A
362 piggy bank with less money is going to be louder." Just because something is loud
363 doesn't mean that it's necessarily the most reasonable or the one you should follow. Just
364 challenging what the community is saying and what people believe often times based off
365 of fear is the one thing I would encourage politician or policy makers to do is, you know,
366 lead. Don't follow based off of what you think is in your best interest for a job or a

367 position. Please.

368 D: What is your message to the community?

369 S: I would kind of go back to meeting your neighbors and expanding that sense of family.

370 The solutions to our problems aren't anything that we need to figure out that's new. I

371 think I hear a lot about, in this work, of, "Let's be innovative," and "What's a creative

372 way we could address this?" We put too much stock in being innovative and creative

373 because the solution to these problems is the exact same as it was centuries ago. It's the

374 same exact same things as it was back in biblical days, right? They had the same

375 problems. These are societal problems. Violence. Segregation. Separation. The "isms."

376 All these types of things that keep us from seeing all the reasons and ways that we are the

377 same instead of different, have always been around in societies and communities. The

378 question is, "Do we have an apparatus for getting through those moments and those

379 experiences that foster separation? Can we lean into empathy? Can we pause on hate?

380 Can we take a breath and not make a decision in haste and in anger?" And so that comes

381 down and makes it so much easier when you actually know the people that are in your

382 area, that might end up doing something crazy. If your family does something that is

383 messed up or is violent or makes a mistake, you don't just disown them. By and large,

384 some people do, but by and large you are going to want to work with them. Maybe not

385 tell the police because you don't want them to get into trouble. That's a strong indication

386 that if you wouldn't tell the police on somebody in your family then you have an

387 understanding of how you want people to be given a second chance. The way we operate

388 has to become more cohesive and that requires that greater understanding of, "Your

389 family is everybody," it's not just the people that are in your household or your blood.

390 And until we grasp that, it's going to be easy to hate and to justify state violence or
391 individual violence.

392 D: Well said, do you have a photo that you will share with us that we can use for the
393 website?

394 S: Yes, I have many photos that, I don't know. Yeah absolutely.

395 D: Great, great, great. And do you have anything you would like to add?

396 S: Yeah, I mean I guess I am incredibly grateful and humbled by just the work you're
397 doing in particular and even asking somebody like myself and Adam, coming up to be on
398 this show. What we have been on the exact opposite side of the experience that kind of
399 got you into this work as well. I won't say, I think it's not right to say, "I am sorry for
400 that experience," but I think it is right to honor the beauty and strength. This spirit that
401 you've shown in this, and I want to thank you for having me come on and letting me
402 speak from a very different side of how I got into this work and how you got into this
403 work.

404 D: [...] But I was just in awe that you have just made me feel so good about forgiving the
405 young man who killed my son. And to see you, for me an example, of what can happen
406 when you forgive. I just want to thank you because I agree with you. Everyone needs a
407 second chance. And we should forgive, and you're a prime example of that. Thank you.

408 S: Thank you.

409 D: I mean that sincerely. Oh, tell us a little bit about your program. What's the name of it
410 and tell us a little bit about it.

411 S: Yeah, so I have three that I am in, so trying to think. The youth one?

412 D: You have a youth one, you have a podcast, and I don't know about the other one.

413 S: Yeah, so I have a non-profit that I started, and I have a for-profit that's focused on the
414 youth work that me and Adam started about a year ago. The youth work organization is
415 called Paradigm Shift, and it didn't even start out focused on youth work at all. It started
416 out as a way for us to hopefully find a way to make some money in this work that we are
417 doing for free, so that we don't have to end up getting a job at Pizza Hut and not be able
418 to do the work. We figured out some creative ways to tap into universities and companies
419 and help them understand how to better utilize and embrace people that have records in
420 their corporations. It became clear to us that the issue of youth violence and that the
421 perception that it has which is not always accurate at all with what is really going on was
422 becoming such a big deal that no one would listen to us when it came to reentry and
423 giving people second chances. If the narrative is so loud about people committing
424 violence in Milwaukee. We kind of just thought about it and said, "You know, we were
425 those very kids when we were younger so who better than us to get in there and offer
426 solutions and be a part of it." We came up with a project that we don't have a, oh yeah,
427 we have a name for it, it's called Mirror. Like the mirror that you look at and see
428 yourself. It has to do with reflecting and that's what a big part of this whole project is to
429 help these kids see themselves differently. To see us as a reflection of their future and
430 then from that see themselves differently and where they could go from it. It's just going
431 to be a matter of having these kids removed from their environment into a really, I think a
432 beautiful idyllic space in this cabin or this farm, whichever one we go to or both, for
433 seven days. And have a variety of people come and talk to them from the city or from
434 that area about what they could be differently. Give them options for therapy and
435 religious components, vocational or educational, trying to tie in some scholarships. If

436 they get their H.A.C.D, kind of find money for them to go wherever they want to go in
437 life, so that if we are paying so much money for kids to go to. It is incredibly expensive
438 to not reach a kid and to let them get to a point where they take a life or they themselves
439 are killed. If we can invest a significant amount of time and money in keeping them from
440 getting there, it wouldn't be enough that we save. I think we just underestimate how
441 much it costs. As Adam likes to say a lot, "How much does it cost to tears, let alone
442 money, when we allow violence to happen from youth and we allow their potential be
443 taken from them or allowing them to take their own potential." It's just going to be a
444 really interesting experience with how much we invest in these kids. This isn't a wide
445 variety of kids that are out there. It's a small minority. It seems like a lot because we
446 believe these narratives in the news and the media. But it's really a small number that are
447 committing some of the really atrocious things that 80-20 rules apply to anything. 80% of
448 stuff is done by 20% of the people in any group, and so if we could hit these youth that at
449 these small numbers and really have an impact there, that could have an astronomical
450 impact on the community. All the people these kids would have negatively affected can
451 be positively affected or not affected because of that. That's the goal, that's the name, and
452 that is kind of the set up right now. We are just designing it. Just working on everything
453 to get it well situated. We don't have all the answers yet, but with the coming months we
454 will be having a lot ready to go and hopefully start the first retreat like late spring.

455 D: That would be great, and also you know Shannon, you learn more as you go.

456 S: Absolutely.

457 D: And now, what about your podcast?

458 S: So that is, "All in All Out." We've had one season. The second season is sitting in my

459 phone, and I haven't been able to get the sound engineer to fix it up yet because I was so
460 busy. I just finished my master's degree yesterday so that will free up some time for me. I
461 am very grateful for that. We just focus on talking about the criminal justice system and
462 highlighting people that have committed violent crimes often times, sometimes in prison
463 still, in a way that is often times is not shown. I think two examples are of one that I have
464 of a friend of mine, two to three years left to serve if he doesn't get early release. He's
465 been in for 21 years and he didn't even, there was no loss of life in his case. It was, I
466 think, robbery with a gun that had no bullets in it. That led to this person who's now done
467 so many remarkable things inside, still having two to three more years, and these are the
468 stories you don't know about from people inside. This isn't like everybody in there at all
469 has that story, but there's just some really remarkable stories from people that are inside,
470 who are coming home and who are home and when heard can help people see this
471 population and demographic in a different way and be open to forgiveness and empathy,
472 which is what we need to get further as a society. And then you have the recidivism topic
473 which oftentimes when people hear about the systems people are like, "Oh recidivism
474 rate is so terrible" or "That program, how many people does it keep from people going
475 back to prison?" But there's so many different nuances in the topic of recidivism and the
476 data, that it's not an accurate statistic at all to follow and it means different things in
477 different places. We just break down stuff like that about what it really means by certain
478 terms you may have heard, what new programs are going on in this place that could be
479 applied here, just address things that I don't feel are being talked about or at least I don't
480 hear being talked about. And people and stories that are not being highlighted as much.
481 That's our goal.

482 D: I agree with you, Shannon. I know I didn't tell you earlier, but I'll tell you now. I
483 retired from the Department of Corrections, and I was behind the fence at R.C.I. Later
484 went to juvi and then probation and parole. I thought all, I wrote up a lot of my coworkers
485 for abusive authority. And you're right, they don't understand what happens behind the
486 scenes. I mean, a guy could be late and have a mean PO who sends him back and pulls all
487 of the work he's done thus far is just destroyed. I get that. So, and sometimes I think
488 back, "What mistakes did I make, you know, when I was there?" And some things that
489 even I didn't see because I had been a part of the system for so long. I totally get it. Are
490 you also fighting taxation without representation, too?

491 S: Yeah, with the Unlock the Vote I think is what is focused on that. There is an
492 organization called EXPO really pushing that.

493 D: Yup.

494 S: I have the shirts. I talk about it. We did some voting stuff before. It's just not our
495 specific lane, but I am involved in it, and yes, it is going on.

496 D: Yeah, you mentioned you had one third. And what's the third one?

497 S: Oh, The Community! So that's the non-profit that I started, and we just pretty much
498 focus on our pre-entry efforts, which is a cutesy way of saying re-entry but well before a
499 person gets close to release. We focus too much on people when they're six months to the
500 door or after they get out. You've almost lost the battle at that point. You should've been
501 focusing on them well before they got out. Our pre-entry work is focusing on people no
502 matter how much time they have from the second they enter to fulfill the potential as a
503 human being as much as possible is what we need in society before they get out. We just
504 have different ways we do that. The narrative side of our work is showcasing/

505 highlighting. Showcasing the successes in humanity and agency of people with criminal
506 records, because my view and our view is that the reason there are so many policies and
507 so much, I am not going to say disregard but antagonism of the people that have criminal
508 records. This easy throw them away, “Oh you have a record,” “Don’t give them housing,
509 don’t employ them,” or “If you do put them in a terrible spot,” not realizing what that
510 actually does long term for society. That stems from the narrative you have about people
511 that have records and the fact that in the media you are always seeing stories of, “So and
512 so had three convicted felonies and he committed this new crime,” and so we think that
513 everybody that has a felony is committing new crimes. If we could show as we do all
514 these different people across the country that are in every field you could think of
515 succeeding that it changes the way you see people that have a record. We have an event
516 which you will be, I am so grateful to have you join in our panel in Madison, January 17th
517 with now Tommy Thompson and representative, republican representative I should say,
518 Michael Schraa, as well will be joining with me and Adam. And we’ll talk about
519 storytelling and how that is so impactful in getting people to see each other and see
520 people that they’ve previously not understood or not cared about in a different way.
521 D: Thank you for that, I am honored. Don’t forget to send me that information so that I
522 can prepare.