

- 1 GVP1 Bettie Ann Rodgers
- 2 D: Please state your name.
- 3 B: My name is Bettie Ann Rodgers.
- 4 D: Okay, and Bettie have you ever been affected in any way by gun violence?
- 5 B: Unfortunately, yes, I have.
- 6 D: Okay and Bettie just speak a little louder.
- 7 B: Okay, unfortunately, yes, I've been affected by gun violence.
- 8 D: And Bettie, may I ask, how old are you?
- 9 B: I'm 68.
- 10 D: Okay, and can you share your story? And--
- 11 B: Just recently turned 68. (laughter) Within the last couple of days actually. (laughter)
- 12 D: So, can you share your story with me please?
- 13 B: Yes. Gun violence, in Milwaukee, it really dates back. And, back in 1975 my baby brother,
- 14 Tommy Lee Barnett, was murdered. He was working in [Arlington Heights] at a gas station in
- 15 Milwaukee. And I believe he worked at a Clark Station at the time and while he was, working,
- 16 some young men, black men, came in. They and they killed him. They shot him. And they killed
- 17 him. I don't know if their intent was to rob the gas station where he was employed. But I don't
- 18 believe the gas station was robbed because I don't remember money missing or anything like
- 19 that. Maybe that was their intent, but they, they killed my baby brother.
- 20 D: I'm so sorry.
- 21 B: He was only 18.
- 22 D: Wow. Did they ca—capture the individuals who killed him?

23 B: Ultimately, they did capture the individuals that murdered my brother. There was a trial had
24 and they were sentenced. (pause)

25 D: Did um, did you attend the trial?

26 B: I could not. For some reason, I just simply could not attend that trial. And-and-and relive the
27 circumstances of his death. Other family members went, but I, personally, emotionally, I-I was
28 unable to handle it so I did not go to the trial.

29 D: After your brother was murdered, um, how did it affect you? How did it change you?

30 B: The my brother never had a chance to mature into the man he was destined to become. Again,
31 he was only 18 years old. When my brother was murdered, I had had it. I did not wanna be in
32 Milwaukee, in Wisconsin, anymore. So, actually, about a month after he died, I sold everything I
33 owned, packed up, and my daughter and I moved to the San Francisco Bay area.

34 D: Wow.

35 B: I, I didn't know any better than to drive a Volkswagen Beetle—

36 D: (laughs)

37 B: --across the mountains, but we left here. I did not wanna be here anymore. I had had my fill of
38 Milwaukee and we left. And we were gone for approximately five years, I just c-didn't wanna be
39 in Milwaukee anymore.

40 D: How was it when you returned?

41 B: It was slightly after I returned that I was contacted by the DA's office, sayin' that they had
42 found the people that killed him. And there was going be a trial. Milwaukee had not changed
43 much. In fact, it had got worse. But, what I saw when we moved to California was that, Oakland,
44 California by the way, where there's even more violence than Milwaukee. So, what I saw was

45 that all the violence that was goin' on in our city was also happening on a larger scale, in other
46 major, major metropolitan areas.

47 D: Wow.

48 B: And so, it wasn't just in Milwaukee, it was like, everywhere, all around us. The violence.

49 D: Did the men who killed your brother, did they apologize?

50 B: Not to my knowledge.

51 D: If—did, do you forgive them? Do you forgive them?

52 B: No. I have not forgiven them. No.

53 D: Is that the first time you've said that?

54 B: No, I have not. And I know people that deal with violence, they say if you can forgive the

55 perpetrator, somehow that opens up your heart. I have not forgiven them, no. And I have not

56 forgiven certain violence incidents that were per—perpetuated upon me. 'Cause I was a victim of

57 a violent crime as well, and no, I have not forgiven these people. And I, in fact, I was thinkin'

58 about forgiveness last night, and I just got warm all over 'cause no, I have not let that go, no. No,

59 have not forgiven them for taking the life of my brother. Who will never come back, no I haven't

60 forgiven them, I'm still pissed about it.

61 (phone goes off)

62 D: What would you—

63 B: Sorry about that.

64 D: It's okay. What would you say to legislators in reference to gun laws? What would you like to

65 see changed?

66 B: I think that the carry and conceal laws that we have on the books now are only perpetuating

67 gun violence. I think that, I don't think that people need to be carrying guns because some of,

68 everybody has a gun. They may not know how to manage their feelings. And I just, it's almost
69 like we live in the Wild Wild West. And almost every mornin' I wake up to somebody else's son
70 or daughter has been murdered. So, I think that the legislators need to carefully look at putting
71 grave conditions on who can carry a gun. And I-I wish that we guns was just something not
72 allowed. Like, in, I think there are countries like Canada, where people can't, people don't carry
73 guns, or is it also in England, where people don't carry guns? Citizens don't carry guns, I think?

74 D: I think so.

75 B: And, and so as a result of that, they have less gun deaths related to gun violence.

76 D: And is there, what would you say to someone who just recently lost a loved one to gun
77 violence?

78 B: I would say be with how you feel and it's a pain and a loss that takes time. So, give yourself
79 that time to heal. I would say talk to your children, the young, young people especially. Show
80 them that there are other ways to resolve their differences short of gun violence. And that once
81 you kill someone, you can't bring that life back. Life is precious. Our lives do matter and the loss
82 of a life impacts one forever. I loved my brother. We all—there are seven of us. Now there are
83 only six of us. We loved our brother. And he had told me prior to his dying that his girlfriend
84 was pregnant, and he does have a child, a little girl and she has children now. And so, he did
85 leave offspring; he did leave a legacy. His little, his, his daughter looks exactly like him.

86 (laughter) But, I don't think that we should have, the average person, or citizens in general
87 should have guns. Because it-it-it, killing, that doesn't resolve anything. And then the person is
88 gone.

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

90 B: Add to that? (pause) That it, (pause)—A lot of the violence that I've seen in the world has left
91 me sp-speechless. Words don't always make it better. And the person who has lost someone to
92 violence sometimes has to seek out a higher power to find some—to be consoled during these
93 hard times. And I just think we all need to work toward a society to put an end toward gun
94 violence. And I also think that so many of us have been touched by it, countless of us have been
95 touched by gun violence, so when you take one life, one is impacting numerous other lives, for
96 time to come. My, my brother's daughter will never know her father. His grandchildren will
97 never know him. Even my daughter had an opportunity to meet him, but she was so young at the
98 time, she probably has very little memory of him. So, gun violence impacts us all throughout
99 infinity and it does need to come to an end. And when we meet people, we never know what
100 they're carrying with them. Or what experiences that they have had. We, we never know who
101 people are for us or who they are, what they've gone through. So, I think that we just need to be
102 a little more kind to each other.

103 D: That was good. It was great, you 'bout to make me cry.

104 (laughter)

105 B: Oh really, you think so? Really?

106 D: It was good. Thank you.

107 B: Okay. So, and then what I'll do, is I'll send you a professional picture of me.

108 D: Okay.

109 B: And I'll tr-try to find the picture of my brother because I know that one was posted from
110 when he was a—