

1 GVP22 Jakayla Phillips

2 D: Can you state your name?

3 J: Jakayla Phillips.

4 D: And how old are you, Jakayla?

5 J: I'm 23.

6 D: And have you experienced gun violence in any form or fashion?

7 J: Yes, my brother was actually killed due to gun violence. Um, it was August 14th, 2012. It was
8 my senior year in high school, within the first week of my senior year actually. And I just
9 remember um, my sister coming to check me out, it was about 9:30 in the morning. And I was
10 lookin' at the, I was listenin' to the intercom and they were callin' for me to come to the office to
11 leave. And I'm just like, "Yeah, somethin' must be wrong." Because I don't understand why I
12 would be gettin' checked out at 9:30 in the morning. And when I seen my sister, she was crying
13 and then she told me that my brother had been killed.

14 D: Oh my god. So, what happened once you were checked out?

15 J: We got outside. And it was my sister driving her car and my aunt was behind her. And my
16 sister was just so distraught, my aunt was worried, um and she was, started askin', "Are you
17 okay to drive? Are you okay to drive?" And my sister just was not, she was not able to drive. So,
18 I'm like, you know what, I-I'll drive us home. I was kind of in shock, in disbelief. Like, I
19 couldn't cry, I couldn't do anything, I couldn't really, I don't know I didn't, I guess I was in
20 disbelief or denial. So, I drove us home. Once I got home, it kind of hit me 'cause everybody was
21 there, my mom, my family, my uncles and everyone was there, crying. And I think it was then
22 that it kind of hit me just a little bit, but not really. I just seen them cryin' and I'm just like,
23 "Yeah, this is, this is not real." So, I didn't really know how to feel so, yeah. I kind of, I wanted

24 to go back to school. I remember telling my sister, or somebody else, "Like, I just wanna go back
25 to school. I don't wanna hear it, I don't wanna deal with it." I-I just didn't believe it was
26 happening, so.

27 D: What school did you go to?

28 J: Um, so then I, we lived in Clarksdale, Mississippi. So, my high school is Clarksdale High
29 School.

30 D: So, oh his shooting didn't take place here in Milwaukee?

31 J: His shooting did take place in Milwaukee, but at the time in 2012, we lived in Mississippi,
32 while my brother lived in Milwaukee. And then shortly after he died, which was when we moved
33 up here, when I graduated high school.

34 D: Okay. So, I can't imagine. You're in Clarksdale, Mississippi, your brother's here in
35 Milwaukee, you gotta tell me from Clarksdale to Milwaukee, what was your experience? How'd
36 you get here?

37 J: Yeah, so um, it was, in total with my mom's kids, there's seven of us. Uh, me and my other
38 sister were the only two that lived in Clarksdale with my mom and dad. And the other five lived
39 up here in Milwaukee, um, along with the brother who got killed. And I had another sister in
40 Milwaukee, so as soon as it happened, she was so distraught and she knew that my mom just
41 needed to get here as soon as possible. So, right away my sister and her fiancé drove down to
42 Mississippi and they just left and came and got us, pretty much. And then we came up here and
43 kind of started planning everything and seeing what was going on and we had a, um, a vigil for
44 him and did all of that. I think it took maybe a week or two before we kind of got the funeral and
45 everything going. Um, but yeah, that's how we got here, my sister came and got us and once we
46 got here, I think that's kind of when it started hitting us that, especially when we got to the vigil,

47 which we t-we had outside of his apartment where he was killed at. Just being there in the
48 moment is what really made it real for everybody. And that's when things kind of just, you
49 know, got real.

50 D: Wow, so, did we, did you find out who killed your brother or what the circumstances were?

51 J: Um, well of course after every murder, you hear rumors and stories and things like that, which
52 happen all the time, but um, to our knowledge, the police don't know who did it. And I don't
53 think no one has been arrested for it, to this day, and it's been years later, so.

54 D: Wow. What year did, was he murdered?

55 J: He was murdered in 2012, August 2012.

56 D: Okay. Um, when, do you still from time to time uh, check with the police to see if there's any
57 new breaks in the case or?

58 J: Yes, my father actually, he calls all the time. And um, each time he'll call, they'll tell him, I
59 remember a while back they said they had a new lead, but we never heard about, we haven't had
60 any updates in a while, so, to our knowledge we, we don't know if they've closed the case. I'm
61 sure it's still open, but we, they don't communicate anything with us, as far as if they found out
62 anything, if they haven't found out anything. We, we, we just don't know.

63 D: Did you ever hear the circumstances or what happened that day from the police, or?

64 J: I didn't hear any-me personally, I didn't hear anything from the police. I just heard what
65 people were tellin' me, um, I don't know. I know earlier that day, my brother, they said he went
66 and like spent time with his baby girl. He got her from daycare, spent the day with her and then, I
67 guess he dropped her back off at daycare. I don't know if him and the baby's mom were having
68 issues or whatever, but I know he would always like, make time to go get her from daycare just
69 to spend time with her. He would give her back to daycare by the time the mom would pick her

70 up. And they said he did that and then he dropped her back off and I don't know what he, you
71 know, specifically did the rest of that time. But later on, they just, the police department got a
72 call from somebody walkin' by I guess that they seen him outside of his apartment. They didn't
73 know if he was like, alive or dead or just intoxicated, they didn't know. But he was yeah, he was
74 dead and I guess maybe there was an altercation, but it led to gunfire and he was shot.

75 D: Oh my god. So, what would you say to someone who recently lost someone to gun violence?

76 J: I would say, losin' someone period whether it's to gun violence or any other tragedy or an
77 illness or anything like that, losin' someone is hurtful and it's hard. And I just feel like the best
78 thing you could do is to try to talk about it and make some type of positive situation come from
79 it. Whether it's like, creating a nonprofit, nonprofit foundation to help other people who are goin'
80 through it or just, I don't know, whatever it can be that you can get involved to try to make
81 people talk about it to help them heal through the process. I think that'll make it better. Like,
82 even with my family, to help us heal, we decided to start sponsoring families for holidays like
83 Christmas, because that was stuff that my brother would love to do, like helping people. So, by
84 us doing that, that helped us to be able to mourn his loss, but in a joyful way. So, I would say to
85 them, if there's anything you can think of that that person loved to do, just keep doin' it to keep
86 their name alive. Don't just let their name go in vain and let their life be for nothing, pretty
87 much.

88 D: And sponsoring a child for Christmas, uh, that your family does, do you, is this uh, been goin'
89 on annually? How long have you guys been doin' this?

90 J: Yeah, so we, um, we've done it um, the past three years. Most recently, we sponsored an
91 eight-year-old this year, well for 2018. Um, so, we have tried to make it a yearly thing. Where
92 we have people send nomination emails or letters or whatever the case may be, let them send

93 those in. And as a family, we kind of talk about each individual family and we select the winner
94 and we invite them into our homes and we actually show them like, a video or s-something to let
95 them know who our brother, who my brother was. Um, and then we explain to them how the
96 sponsorship came about and after they know a little bit about him, we start, you know, like
97 listenin' to music, just havin' fun, just being joyful in honor of my brother who was killed. So
98 that it doesn't have to be such a sad occasion, like, we're helping somebody through our loss.
99 And that's what makes it a good thing for us.

100 D: What would you like, how do you think that we could uh, eliminate or lower gun violence in
101 Milwaukee?

102 J: I think that a big thing is when we hear about violence in general, I feel like it's paid attention
103 to a lot when someone of a different race does it. Like white police officers or white people in
104 general. We pay a lot of, of attention to that. Or like rallies and all type of things we do, but I feel
105 like when it's black on black crime, we, we talk about it, but it's not a big deal, like we don't
106 really throw a rally because a black person killed another black person. So, I think when we hold
107 ourselves to the same standards and we really like, unify and come together, I think that can
108 lower gun violence and trying to find other ways to get out the anger, if you have a conflict with
109 somebody. You don't have to just go get a gun. You don't have to fight about it. You can try to
110 find a way to talk about it. So, maybe having some type of trainings or meetings to help people
111 deal with anger and conflict, 'cause I feel like right, like the first mindset is to get a gun to end
112 this, the, the issue. And I'm, that shouldn't be the first, that shouldn't be the first option, yeah.

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

114 J: Um, I don't think so. It's just, gun violence is a huge issue and I feel like now, people are kind
115 of highlighting it and they're, they're seeing that this is a big issue in our community. And I feel

116 like, whatever you can do that can help to lower it, or just bring back the love, I think that people
117 should do, do it. Don't be afraid, just, just do it.

118 D: Thank you! That was good! (laughter)

119 Part II (the 2:48 clip)

120 D: Jakayla you said um, that at one point it was really hard for you to look at a picture of your
121 brother. Can you speak to that?

122 J: Yeah, um, so when it first happened, of course, it would be moments where we would see
123 pictures and videos and I would have to right away like, turn my head. I did-I couldn't really
124 stand the sight of seein' him. I couldn't like, watch videos, certain songs of his, 'cause my
125 brother was an artist. And he recorded music, so, certain songs, one in particular which was his
126 last recorded song, I can't stand to listen to. Um, but yeah for a long time I just couldn't see
127 pictures of him. It just became like, easier for me, maybe the last year or two. For me to like,
128 come to that realization, seeing his pictures, watching, like, old memories of him. But, videos are
129 of course, still hard. Um, yes, it's getting easier but i-it, the pain will never go away, obviously.
130 But it does get easier, after a while. And it's gotten easier for me, but, certain things are still, you
131 know, hard.

132 D: If they were to capture the person who killed your brother, would, would you forgive him? Or
133 do you forgive the person who killed your brother?

134 J: Thankfully, the way we were raised, we were raised on love and for me, hate is just, I don't
135 live like that. Hate is not in me for anybody, to be honest. So, I feel like if they did, to be, I don't
136 hate the person that killed my brother, for one. So, if they did find him, I think I can forgive him
137 because my mom raised us in the church and I know that forgiveness is what you need for
138 someone to, for the release that someone has on you to be let go of. Until you forgive a person,

139 they still have that power over you. And I've learned that by my mom raisin' us in the church.
140 And, so, if they found him, I would forgive him. But I, like I've said in the past, honestly, for me,
141 closure isn't for them to find him because it, it doesn't bring my brother back. For us to have to
142 sit in a court room, relive those moments and go through that whole situation, so, for me, like, I
143 don't need that to have closure, for us to find the person and go through court, honestly. 'Cause
144 it's just gonna bring the pain and make the pain worse. So, I just feel like, if they never found the
145 person, I would be okay because my brother is gone, he's not, he's not comin' back. So, that's
146 not going to give me any r-relief at all, so.

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

148 J: I think that's it.

149 D: You come up with a good one right out there, I couldn't (inaudible) the thing.