

1 GVP4 Brooke Shawver

2 D: Okay, can you tell me, can you state your name and your age?

3 B: Sure. Brooke Shawver and I'm thirty-eight years old.

4 D: Wow, you don't look thirty-eight, girl.

5 (laughter)

6 B: Thank you.

7 D: You're welcome. (laughter) So, Brooke have you experienced gun violence in any form?

8 B: Yes, I have. Actually in a few different ways in my life. First when I was 9 years old, my
9 childhood best friend, William Bidgood, got ahold of his dad's gun that was in his office desk
10 and turned it around on himself and unintentionally shot and killed himself.

11 D: Oh my god.

12 B: And yeah, it was, I still remember to this day, my parents telling me that and just, just the, just
13 how it affected me and how long it took me to get over that and realizing he wasn't coming back
14 and the finality of that at such a young age was, was difficult. My second experience happened
15 later in life, I was twenty-four living in Chicago and I was in a-an intimate partner abuse
16 situation. And one night he held me at gunpoint in a very small bathroom for about three hours
17 and assaulted me with that gun, hitting me across the face and dislocating my jaw and knocking
18 out a couple teeth. I just cir—just circumstances aligned for me that night and I truly believe just
19 because a few things went a certain way that that's why I'm here today. And thank—there are
20 ways that that could've been prevented if we had better gun laws in place. And then finally just
21 the communities I've lived in both, in Milwaukee and then in Chicago. I experienced gun
22 violence—I had two individuals who were shot in my backyard here in Milwaukee. I also had a
23 neighbor who was pistol whipped by a group of other teenagers and I, you know, helped him and

24 called the police. And just dealing with that sort of community violence that, that we see, that's
25 so prevalent right now.

26 D: What area in your—in the, the vicinity is your backyard where the two were—

27 B: Sure, they, we live down on the Southside and they were chasing a man, a young man, two
28 other individuals and h—we were one of the only yards that had, didn't have an 8-foot security
29 fence and so he was just trying to get through our yard to get to the back alley. They were
30 probably right, they were right next to our house, I would say they weren't more than 'bout five
31 feet from the side of my house and they were about twenty-five feet from him. They were
32 shooting to kill him but they hit him in the leg and so we hear- I heard the gun shots. I was home,
33 I was pregnant. I think I was like, seven months pregnant with my second child. My mom was
34 there staying with us. And it was, I mean it was traumatic, like, if they would've aimed in a
35 different way, that could've come through a window, that could've come through, ya know, my
36 daughter's window or our window, or, you know, downstairs where my mom was sleeping. And
37 so that happened on two different occasions. And then in the same house I witnessed my
38 neighbor get pistol whipped outside my kitchen window. And I called the police and took them a
39 good amount of time to get there. But I nursed him on my porch until they got there.

40 D: Wow.

41 B: Yeah.

42 D: What would you say to someone who has just recently experienced gun violence? What
43 would you say to help them get through a traumatic experience?

44 B: Sure. First, I say that we all experience trauma and grief and violence, we all internalize that
45 and, and deal with it in different ways. So, first of all I would say is that there's no right or wrong
46 way to deal with this type of trauma and to find a network of people who understand what you're

47 going through because there's nothing I think more, not empower—empowering but also just
48 giving you that sense of safety. I think when you go through gun violence, it takes away your
49 sense of safety, it takes away your sense of feeling protected and safe no matter where you are.
50 You sort of lose that and I think having a community of, of other survivors who understand that,
51 whether it's the same, whether it's domestic violence to domestic violence, or it's, you know,
52 having a child murdered compared to what I've gone through. Like, we all can understand what
53 that feels like and I think it's truly just when you're ready, being able to talk about it with other
54 people who understand is, is, is some of the best medicine you can, that you can find.

55 D: What would you say to legislators that you'd like to see changed in reference to gun laws?

56 B: Sure. Like, top of—I mean there's so many things—but top of my list is universal background
57 checks. We know that if that happens in this state, like, we're going to see a reduction in gun
58 violence because you're taking out those backdoor gun sales, you're taking out the, the sales that
59 happen on the, you know, online, everybody's getting that background check. And it just
60 eliminates—

61 D: (phone call) I'm sorry Brooke.

62 B: It's okay, now I just have, you have to remind me of what (laughter) the question was.

63 D: So, we were talking about—

64 B: Oh yes, universal background checks. And we know, we see the statistics that show that that
65 is going to reduce the amount of gun deaths that we are seeing in this country. It's because
66 people who are not, who should not have guns, including domestic violence abusers, you know,
67 felons, anyone who has a history of that kind of violent behavior, we are going to eliminate some
68 of that.

69 D: (phone call)