

1 GVP42 Pardeep Kaleka

2 D: Can you please state your name?

3 P: Sure, it's Pardeep Singh Kaleka.

4 D: Comin' in good. And what is your age?

5 P: I'm forty-two years old.

6 D: And your nationality?

7 P: I am Indian, East Indian.

8 D: Okay, and your gender?

9 P: Male, I identify as male.

10 D: And what neighborhood area of Milwaukee do you live?

11 P: I live in Greendale right now.

12 D: And how long have you lived there?

13 P: I've lived there for approximately eleven years.

14 D: Wow. And share your story, tell me—

15 P: Sure.

16 D: —how gun violence affected your life.

17 P: Gun violence affected my life on August 5th, 2012, when a white supremacist gunman walked

18 into the Sikh temple of Wisconsin in Oak Creek and murdered six people, one of those people

19 was my father and temple president, Satwant Singh Kaleka. And my mom survived, she was

20 inside the temple at the time. My children survived and I survived, but the loss of my father and

21 those five other people really inspired our community to be more engaged and involved into the

22 broader community and from that time on I've been working to let the broader community, let,

23 you know, know who the other is. And the other can be, you know, obviously it can be Punjabi

24 Sikhs, but the other can also be the lesbian, the gay, the transgender, the, you know, the ethnicity
25 that is little known, the other can be anyone of us and really just giving voice to maybe those that
26 might not have or feel like they have as much voice within, within our society. And that is, that
27 mission and purpose has really taken me on a national journey of addressing gun violence. Not
28 just in the state of Wisconsin, but how do we address it within our nation? And how do we create
29 reasonable gun legislation that everybody can agree upon? You know, at targeted places of, of
30 violence or targeted people of violence are, you know, have been suffering at the ramifications of
31 lax gun laws, for a very long time. And I think it's seeping into the, the American psyche. And I
32 notice with myself of, of the frustration of not being able to do enough with the, the, you know,
33 the gifts and, and the privilege that this country has.

34 D: (pause) When the attack happened at the temple—

35 P: Mhmm.

36 D: —Were you guys in the moment of prayer? And where is the temple located?

37 P: Yeah, so, o-our temple is located in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. It is the biggest Sikh temple in
38 Wis-in, in, Wisconsin. We have, there's four of them. But it is, it definitely has the biggest
39 congregation. And what happened that day wa-was, you know, the shooter arrived around,
40 around 10AM. Thankfully, we don't have a lot of congregation that arrive that early, most the
41 people that get there are, are really the, the, the most devout honestly. The people that are gonna
42 help in the kitchen, create, make food for the rest of the day, prepare services and things like that,
43 and, and, and you know, the priest. So, they arrive early. And so my mom and dad were already
44 there, they, they, they will be the first ones there and typically the last ones to leave. Once the
45 shooter get, got there, there was two kids who were outside in the parking lot. And the shooter
46 approached two brothers, in the parking lot. Shot both of them at point blank range. The, the two

47 young, children saw this happening with their own eyes and they ran inside the temple and they
48 started warning people, you know, “White, a white man is shooting outside!” And you could
49 kind of hear the echo of gunshots inside, but you didn’t really know what it was. And that’s what
50 I’ve been told by the people that were inside the kitchen area at the time. And just the franticness
51 and panic of the, you know, of those children everybody started to find places to be able to hide.
52 There was approximately fifty people inside at the time. But luckily those, those children warned
53 everybody and, you know, the, those that weren’t able to find a place to hide, you know, they
54 were, they were before other people would be shot inside. One lady would be, one lady who was
55 coming out of the prayer hall was the next victim when he walked inside. And he went and
56 chased her and shot her. And then he came outside of the main prayer hall, went into the kitchen
57 area, went after the women, the women were able to hide in the closet at the time. And so fifteen
58 women hiding in one closet. They were really s-I mean, they were really sitting ducks. But he
59 didn’t know that there was a closet, he figured that it was an exit. So, luckily that you know, his
60 mindset was really on, on tryna get as many people as fast as he could. And he moved down
61 from there and he, he just sort of methodically went through the place looking for people, so in
62 the last person that he found was my father. And my father was trying to at the time, he notified
63 the police, called dispatch and let them know what, what was going on inside the, the temple at
64 the time. He was one of the, one of the best English-speaking people. And so, you know, he, he
65 would be the next victim and he would be the last actual victim before the, the, the shooter left.
66 And, you know, he attempted to put up a fight when you know, he had a small little butter knife
67 by him, so he tried to stab the shooter with the butter knife. But, you know, a butter knife is not
68 gonna do too much against a, a, a gun. And I’ve been told by a lot of people, you know, “Your
69 dad,” you know, “should’ve had a gun rather than have had a knife,” when we get into these

70 discussions. And you know, sometimes it bothers you, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes you're
71 like, "Yeah, maybe he should've. Maybe we should get guns into the, to like, those that are more
72 responsible." But often, you know, I, I feel like, personally, the brave don't need guns. And, and
73 it's really much more of a fear response, to always have to carry a gun. And, and that's sort of a,
74 an effect on your psyche much more than, much more than it does any good. But, you know, so
75 he would be the, he would be the last victim who would perish that day. And the gunman went
76 outside and tried to get back into his truck, his pick-up truck, and drive off from the temple. But
77 then a policeman approached him and like, got into, they both got into a firefight against one
78 another, the policeman would lose the firefight and be shot fifteen times from close range. And at
79 one point, the shooter was just plugging him from on top of him. So, he's just lying on the
80 ground while the poli-while the shooter is really just shootin' like, from close range. And, but
81 thankfully he ended up surviving. Most of the shots that he suffered were into his bulletproof
82 jacket.

83 D: Okay.

84 P: And some of them were outside of that, but, did not hit anything that, that would you know,
85 take his life that day. And then after that, that, that bought enough time for the next police officer
86 to arrive on the scene. And then the shooter and that police officer engaged in the firefight and,
87 and that police officer actually ended up hitting the shooter. And, as, as the shooter was hit, he
88 decided that he was not gonna be taken alive. So, he took his own life. And he put the gun to his
89 head and took his own life. The entire incident actually probably lasted about six minutes.

90 D: Sounds forever.

91 P: Yes, it, it does. And I think that's, that's you know, just, these incidents are so fast in, in time,
92 but they, they really do sound forever. And I think they leave lasting impacts. And it really does

93 become, those you know, the, the family or the, you know, those that are left behind to really
94 pick up the pieces. And so, that's, that's the saddest part is that if, if, you know, these things that
95 are so quick, the, the ramifications last forever.

96 D: Of course. Do you forgive the shooter?

97 P: For me, forgiveness, forgiveness is my own interpretation of what I wanna, like, what I wanna
98 see in the world. And to me, forgiveness is, is really vengeance. It's really saying to somebody,
99 "You're not gonna have power over me." And I knew early, early on that I was struggling with
100 feelings of anger, frustration, the "what ifs" as we talked about before, the, the you know, to, the
101 frustration of how long it took law enforcement to get in there, so a lot of resentment was already
102 brewing I mean, right, right as, I mean, even that day and the days following. And I knew that if
103 I did not go on this path of forgiveness, and it's just, it's a journey. So, as far as like, being able
104 to say that you totally forgive, I don't think that you can ever because it's always, it's, it's always
105 a process. But I was willing to take that journey. And that wasn't to forget what happened, it
106 wasn't to say I condone what happened, it was really to say to myself, "Either you can, either
107 you can become bitter or you can become better." And if you become, if you become bitter, you
108 do, you're not gonna be there for your family, you're not gonna be there for your children,
109 you're not gonna truly be there for this community as much as you might want to, as much as
110 you might feel like because what happened you wanna protect, you wanna help pass gun
111 legislation. And you wanna make a society better than it was before. If you, if you yourself truly
112 do not go on your own personal journey, you really cannot become better. And I, and I say to
113 most people, "The difference between being bitter and better is you have to change one letter,
114 and that's the 'I'."

115 D: Mmm.

116 P: First and foremost. And so, I knew that it was, it was much more, much less a journey about
117 forgiving the shooter, but maybe, maybe having vengeance that the shooter's not gonna be able
118 to take my life and what it means to my family and my community and my friends. And, and
119 really, really to being able to say, "I need to go back and a-also forgive myself for what I might
120 not have done when I had the chance to do it." A lot of times when shooting survivor's, they
121 wrestle with, not just the incident of what happened that day, but what they should've said when
122 they had the chance to say that. And, and I think that's, that's what a lot of us struggle with, is
123 that we didn't have that last conversation. We didn't explicitly express that, "I love you
124 regardless of all the friction we might've had or all the conflict." And I think we beat ourselves
125 up over all that. So, really the forgiveness is not, not just you're forgiving the shooter, but you're
126 forgiving yourself. And it's, it's foraging freedom to, to be able to move and live, live a life
127 worth living.

128 D: That's beautiful. What would you say, you mentioned earlier about the police and their
129 response time, how were you able to accept that?

130 P: How was I? That's a great question. And, and my, my being informed of police and police
131 response time was from my past of being a police officer and I, you know, I was a Milwaukee
132 police officer. What I saw happen that day was really this, sit and wait, sit and wait, sit and wait.
133 Whereas in Milwaukee I don't think we had a incident where we sat and wait, waited that long.
134 And, and I think, you know, even if it was an active shooter or somebody with a gun or, you
135 know, we were going in there. And part of my resentment was, were we not worth going in there
136 for?

137 D: Hmm.

138 P: If it had been a church, if it had been a church full of white people, if it had been a shooter that
139 was brown or black or Muslim or, would their response time have been different? And, you
140 know, I-I wrestled with all that. I wrestled with the, knowing the fact that it didn't feel like it was
141 worth getting to know our people until the, until August 5th. And I wondered why police had not
142 been in that building before. And, and I wonder that for different communities, of when do
143 determine that this community is not worth doing whatever for? When do we demean the value
144 of peoples' worth?

145 D: When you say that, how were you able to come to terms with that?

146 P: I guess, when I say that I-I-I don't wanna come to terms with it. I, you know, I'm a very God,
147 and I wouldn't say God-fearing, I would say God-fearing too, I would say God-loving. God-
148 respecting. Before August 5th happened, I don't think I was really in tune with my faith, nor was
149 I in tune with other faiths. I, I didn't, I had this sort of antagonistic relationship with God and,
150 and people who believed in God. And I, I would be like, "Why do you, why do you need to
151 believe or pray or you know, to whatever?" And I think overtime what I, what, what helps me
152 reconcile with that contradiction of the way that people view one another with less worth or more
153 worth, you know, what have you, is that my relationship to the divine is much, is much closer.
154 And, and when we talk about faith, we talk about something that we cannot see, but we know to
155 be true. And I know to be true that the divine, our source, the creator exists in all God's creation
156 and everything that God's created. And to say that somebody is less worth or more worth than
157 someone else, is, is an illusion. And it just basically means that we have, because we are in this
158 world, that we have fallen, that we have fallen in love with the truths of this world. But, but, but
159 this, this only a moment of time and it will be gone. And, you know, I-I just look at, I challenge
160 people to, I think that's the biggest challenge to people. It's to say that if, you know, God created

161 everything to have its own personal uniqueness. And if, if God created everything the same and
162 said, "Okay, everything's the same," they'll treat, everybody has the same amount of money.
163 Everybody has the same history. Everybody has the same circumstances. Well then, it would be
164 like, it wouldn't challenge anybody's faith to say, "I see, I see the divine in the person that looks
165 like me," because obviously you do. The people that look like you, walk like you, eat like you,
166 pray like you, talk like you, right? We see the divine in those people. But the challenge is really,
167 your spiritual challenge, everyone's spiritual challenge is: do you see it in the person that does
168 not?

169 D: Wow. (pause) Wow.

170 P: And we haven't, I will say human beings right now are not, are not rising to that challenge.

171 And it takes people of spiritual caliber to say, "I need you to rise to that challenge." But you and
172 me know that there's a lot of people with spiritual caliber would say to their spiritual caliber,
173 would also, not be doing the same thing. (laughter)

174 D: You're absolutely right. What do you think we could do to lower gun violence?

175 P: I think that's I mean, I think treating it as a public health problem, I-I-I think that's the first
176 and foremost. We have, we have to allow the center of disease control to be able to investigate
177 this as a public health problem. And I know that some people have, but we haven't created a
178 culture around it. And if you just have a few people who are starting to treat it like that and
179 having created a culture around the way that we investigate and look at it and say, okay, if we
180 take something such as like, let's just say, vehicle, vehicle deaths. We know that within our life
181 time, within like mine and your lifetime, we have seen vehicle deaths come down every single
182 year overtime. And that's because you know, in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, we had cars that
183 were not really equipped to be able to say, "Okay, we need airbags." "And now we need

184 seatbelts.” “Now, we need seatbelt laws.” “Now we need to configure roads which don’t have
185 the bumper over there.” And, “If somebody is drunk driving we need to have you know, lane
186 dividers.” And, “Those lane dividers need to be able to, like, wake somebody up.” And so, over
187 time, being able to investigate and say, “Okay, what are the causes this year of, of, of vehicle
188 deaths. How can, what can we do working with car manufacturers, working with the highway
189 patrol, or working with those that build the freeways?” And things like that. Now we can, now
190 we can work on remedying this. We don’t do the same things for gun violence. We don’t
191 understand it as a multidimensional problem. And so, we don’t develop multidimensional
192 solutions. A lot of people would say, “Okay, well, it’s this or that.” No, it’s this and that. And all
193 these things factor into a lot of this stuff. And, and so, treating it as a multi-multidimensional
194 problem would say, “Okay let’s, let’s have people register their guns. First and foremost, let’s
195 just register our guns.” You can’t own a vehicle without having it registered. You can’t, you
196 can’t drive a vehicle without taking a road test. Why? But you can get a, you can get a gun. Just
197 by getting a gun without knowing how to shoot it. So, first and foremost, getting it registered.
198 And I think most people would, most people that I’ve spoken to that own guns say, “Yeah, that,
199 that makes sense.” I was with a group from, from Israel yesterday police officers and border
200 patrol. And they, even they remarked at how, just lax our gun laws are. I-I have never met, and I
201 put this on record, I’ve never met anybody, and I meet a lot of people from foreign countries, I
202 have never met one who has said that, “Your gun laws are not, are, are, are not la-are, are not
203 lax.” Everyone has said, everyone no matter their political affiliation, what country they’re from,
204 are like, “Your gun laws are just too relaxed, too, nobody cares.” And we gotta understand that’s,
205 that’s for a reason. That’s, that’s, that’s for a reason that’s because right now we’re allowing the
206 NRA, we’re allowing other lobbying groups to, to say, “Okay, you know what? Because guns do

207 not have an expiration date, we need to keep selling more of them to keep gun manufacturers
208 rich. And drive up the prices. No matter the ramifications it has on the society.” So, I, I think
209 just, just treating it as a public health problem, being you know, registering it, limiting the
210 amount of guns you can buy per month, having cool down periods, having police officers to say,
211 “Okay, if somebody’s having a domestic situation with their partner, you can’t have guns in your
212 house anymore.” Because, it’s the nearest and dearest that usually suffer from the consequences
213 of, of that person having a gun. It’s, it’s, violence is usually proximal. Meaning that if you have a
214 bunch of guns on the north side of Milwaukee, who’s gonna be shot? People on the north side of
215 Milwaukee. Right? And I think that whole mindset of being able to segregate violence and say,
216 “Oh,” you know, Tupac once said it in, in a lyric, “Give ‘em guns, step back, let ‘em kill each
217 other.” That’s not just a motto in the United States and in the inner city, that’s the motto that
218 we’ve used worldwide. Supply guns, right? Give them weapons, step back and let ‘em destroy
219 each other. We don’t gotta get our hands dirty. It is, this is conflicts in the Middle East, this is
220 conflicts in Africa, this is conflicts wherever we have touched. (laughter) Wherever the United
221 States has really touched. We’ve, we have cre- we have ma- we have manufacture, not that we
222 have manufactured the tension, but we have definitely exploited the tension. And when we
223 exploit the tension and give people weapons, they end up killing one another, therefore we can
224 take advantage of the resources.

225 D: Hmm, wow.

226 P: And so, what’s a resource in the United States? What is, what is the, what is, what is the, what
227 is the advantage of seeing inner city violence play out? And, and, and, and, maybe I don’t know.

228 I, I would say that it’s a, it’s a, it’s much more looking and saying, “You know what? We can

229 segregate that violence to only exist over there?” And, “That won’t happen in our
230 neighborhoods.” But the, the, the issue now is it is happening in their neighborhoods.

231 D: In their neighborhoods.

232 P: Yeah.

233 D: Wow, that was deep.

234 P: Yeah, I don’t wanna get too much into conspiracy theories, but. (laughter)

235 D: No.

236 P: Yeah. (laughter) But it’s true. It’s, you know, if you give people guns, if you give people
237 anything, weapons and say, “Okay, we’re supplying you weapons.” Now, there’s a point in time
238 that we gave Al Qaida weapons and said, “Okay, as long as you, as long as you kill the enemy
239 for us, then, then fine.” But, but it’s like, now, how does that come back and haunt us?

240 D: Mhmm.

241 P: Well, we learned on September, September 11th, how that came and haunted us. Because they
242 realize what you use them for. This is, this is. (pause)

243 D: What would you say to elected officials?

244 P: Hmm. Yeah.

245 D: In reference to gun violence.

246 P: Yeah. Yeah, ‘cause that was a, that was an open ended one. (laughter) Our elected officials,
247 we could say a lot to the elected officials. Debra, don’t get me started, I’m like. (laughter)

248 D: I hurried up and added gun violence.

249 P: Yeah. No, I, I think the, I think the same things—

250 D: Or the laws.

251 P: —Yeah. Yeah. I think what I can say to elected officials is, let's not pimp the constitution so
252 much so that it serves the purpose that we need it to serve. But, let's have some responsibility as
253 we go forward with gun laws. We can look at the constitution and we can look at the, look at the
254 time and that it was created. And we can understand that it, the first amendment was created
255 during a time that we basically had mail tellers who had to get on horseback and be able to
256 deliver a note. Communication was hard to do. So, freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom
257 of all that looked completely different than it does in the technology age. When we look at the
258 second amendment, freedom to bear arms. That looked completely different when the
259 constitution and the forefathers came up with the constitution. Now, the inspiration to have that
260 was to ha-to ensure free state, to ensure freedoms. At the same time, right now it's not, when we
261 look it and we say, okay, you had one buck-shot a gun, which you had to load and it took you
262 thirty seconds to load this gun, put the gun powder in it, and then you had to shoot it, and often
263 times when you shot it, back in the 1700s, it wasn't even accurate. So, now, you have, now fast
264 forward to today, 2019, you have weapons of mass destruction. And you have communication of
265 mass destruction. And if you put both of those together, you have a toxic soup. And we wonder
266 today why we have one mass shooting per day, we're averaging one mass shooting per day in the
267 United States. We are averaging you know, like, I don't need to go into numbers too much, but
268 30,000 gun-related deaths per year, right? What's, what's happening is we don't know how, like,
269 the gun laws right now, we can't control people. Not that we can't control people, but people
270 right now are, are, are being unhinged. And they're being unhinged because of all the
271 information that they're taking in. The two biggest problems that are facing society right now is
272 habituation and identity-motivated reasoning. So, identity-motivated reasoning basically is that
273 we want to hear what we want to, what already confirms what we already believe. And so, no

274 matter what social media platform you're on, you start to silo yourself. Meaning that if you start
275 to hit like on something, it keeps agreeing with you, right? And then the other part is habituation.
276 Habituation is basically just, getting used to the soup that we exist in, no matter how miserable it
277 is. And this is what America looks like right now. It's that, it's that we have gotten so used to the
278 soup that we exist in, that we don't think it's not normal until somebody else from another place
279 comes in from Israel or someone else and says, "This is crazy. What you guys are going through
280 is crazy." And then, you, you're like, "Oh, well, this is just normal for us." We're, it's normal for
281 us to have a shooting per day. We're, it's normal for us to have a school shooting th-they're, and
282 people are telling us, that's not normal. But just like the frog in boiling water, we think it's
283 normal to the point that you know, the frog in boiling water pretty much is boiling to the point
284 that he can't jump out because his mu-muscles, his muscles don't work anymore. And that's,
285 that's what we are right now. Is that, we can't jump out, so we need our politicians and our
286 leaders to step up and, and really say, "We, th-this is unreasonable." The amount of people that
287 have guns, that have them right now, it's unreasonable. I don't know if we'll be able to
288 confiscate them. I don't know if we can limit the amount of ammunition, but at some, some point
289 we have to develop some more courage. And we need our leaders to lead. We need our
290 politicians to, to develop spines.

291 D: Wow. The NRA says that the reason why we need to have our guns is if we ever have to
292 override our government in case that they become out of control. What would you say to that?

293 P: I, I, you know, the NRA and our government know that both of those hypotheticals are just
294 riding the angst of people. And you know, I often times, I joke and I say, you know, "We are the
295 USA. The United States of Anxiety." And, and there's a lot of people that are driven by fear in
296 this country. If our government wants to lock us up in FEMA cages and wants to do whatever

297 they want to do, they'll be able to do what they wanna do. And there's no amount of, y-you're
298 nine-millimeter, automatic hand-gun will not be able to do anything about it. The, the, that's just,
299 I mean, that's just how powerful our government and our military is. If, if they wanted to do
300 something, they would do it. Now, they don't wanna do anything. The, your most valuable asset
301 as a human being is that you are a consumer. So, now, instead of having like, you know, pretty
302 much what, what the, what society's gonna do is, at some point you're gonna just have a barcode
303 in your wrist. And you're gonna be able to buy whatever you need to buy from wherever you
304 need to buy it from because that's what circulates the economy. If they have us locked up in
305 FEMA cages and takin' our guns away and all this stuff, right? Then people are like w-like,
306 worried about this doomsday speculation of, "This is what the government is going to do to us."
307 How will they have you be a consumer? Th-they need you to be a consumer. They need, and,
308 and wh-what especially important with that is, the powers that be, every corporat--you know, the
309 United States of America is, is not a country with a long history. It has a short history. And it's a
310 corporation, much more than it has a culture. And so, what drives us is the, the NAZ Dec and the
311 S&P and how much money we're making. And that's actually what regulates change, back and
312 forth. If you see the stock market drop by too much, then what's gonna happen is politicians are
313 gonna be worried and then they're gonna, and then there's gonna be, then, you know, there's not,
314 there's not gonna be a, think about impeachment. If the stock market drops by too much, there
315 will be an impeachment. Because if you, if you get in the way of the economy, you get in the
316 way of this, this country and this corporation. And, and for us, we have to have faith that you
317 know, we are the consumers. We consume it. All of our social media, things that we take in,
318 right, the president that we elected, that's, that's not just a responsibility. And we blame it on the
319 president, say, "Well this because of..." No. That's a reflection of us. We didn't, we didn't elect

320 a narcissist because, because we're just a benevolent society which is humble, we ourselves,
321 Americans as a society are narcissistic. Therefore, the president is a reflection of us. Not us a
322 reflection of the president. And social media and consumerism and all of that is a reflection of
323 us. What we see, these gun laws, as much as, as much as we might wanna even blame the NRA.
324 And, and really, it's the will of the people. And the people need to understand that they need to
325 take that back. At some point we lost, we lost that. And we started to worship people. And we
326 started to worship people who had more, more Twitter followers. We started to worship people
327 who are celebrities, or politicians. It's really about the people. And the people need to s-to step
328 up and say, "You know what? I, we take this back. We want safer neighborhoods. We want gun
329 legislation that makes sense." Register your damn gun, and let's hold people accountable. Let's
330 hold gun stores accountable. If the gun store sells to somebody who is on the watchlist, a terror
331 list, then that gun, that gun store gets shut down. You would do it for anybody else.

332 D: Right.

333 P: If, if a gas station sells cigarillos or cigarettes to somebody, you would give them a fine or a
334 ticket. Why is this not happening to gun stores? Why can they sell to convicts or I mean, if our
335 shooter, our shooter bought his gun eight days before the shooting. He was a known threat to the
336 FBI, the ADL, the SPLC, he was a known threat. And he was able to legally purchase a firearm
337 off of 84th street in West Allis.

338 D: Hmm!

339 P: And they were never held accountable. He did a background check, went through. So, now, if
340 you can sell to known terror group suspects and there's no consequences, what is that, what,
341 what does that say to anyone else who is tryna purchase a firearm?

342 D: Hmm. (pause) Wow. Is there anything you wanna add?

343 P: No.

344 D: Thank you!

345 P: You're welcome.

346 D: Wow.

347 P: If I keep, if I keep addin' more (laughter).