

1 GVP47, Jarrett English

2 D: Please state your name.

3 J: My name is Jarrett English.

4 D: And can you tell me what is your age?

5 J: I'm 36 years old.

6 D: And what is your nationality?

7 J: I'm a Black American.

8 D: And can you tell us a little bit about, tell me a little bit about yourself?

9 J: So, born and raised in Milwaukee. Kind of half, in the Rufus King neighborhood and the other
10 half in Sherman Park. Went away for about two years for school. I went to college and then came
11 back, transferred here to UW-Milwaukee and I've been here ever since.

12 D: Okay. So, you're a native Milwaukeean?

13 J: Native Milwaukeean.

14 D: Okay. So, I know you have a story of loss due to gun violence. Do you remember what
15 happened?

16 J: Yeah, so, you know it's, it's one of those things and I hate to say it like this, you know a lot of
17 people who originally have you know, these same types of stories, you know, wasn't someone
18 who was you know, in my immediate family, but you know it's, this is a person who was a part
19 of you know, my life and you know coming up. And so, so, the person who, you know, who is
20 now no longer with us is a friend of mine. And yeah, I haven't talked to him so I don't
21 permission to say, you know, exactly who he is. But that being the case, you know, we grew up
22 you know, played together, you know, we did everything that kids do coming up. And roughly
23 about the time, that I was on my way to college, unbeknownst to me at that point, he was on his

24 way to prison. And so, you know, fast forward, and this is literally only a few years ago,
25 probably fast forward fifteen years you know, obviously and I'm outta school and I'm doing the
26 "adult thing", as they say. And I'm with my grandmother and she just went grocery shopping,
27 and his grandparents actually live across the street from mine.

28 D: And what area is that?

29 J: This is Rufus King, Garden Homes area, kind of like between Green Bay and Teutonia there.

30 And so that being the case, you know, we were taking groceries in the house, doing whatever,
31 it's summertime like it is now and I see this person just kind of walking across the street and, and
32 you know he, you know, now that I think about it, he didn't really change much at all. He looked
33 exactly as he did when we were teenagers almost. Obviously a little taller, a little older, but you
34 know, it was him. So, I-I look, I put whatever I had in my hand down. I, I say, I say his name it's
35 like, and, and he responds. And, and comes across the street. And so, you know, I was like,
36 "Man, is that you?" And he's like, "Yeah, that's me." And I'm like, "Man, where you been?"
37 And, and he's you know, he was real straight forward about it, he's like, "You know, I, I was, I
38 was, I was locked up." And I was like, "Man, how long you been, how long you been out?" And,
39 you know, he, I think he said literally like a month or something like that. He had just gotten out
40 of prison. As I was, you know, blessed to, to go to college and you know, learn new things, meet
41 new people, he was you know, locked up in a penitentiary. And, and so that being the case you
42 know, I just you know, I didn't want to you know, dwell on that because I know that was, that's
43 hard, and so, I was like, "You know what?", and I just gave him a hug, and I was like, "You're
44 home now." And so, you know, I told him, "Give me your number so we can, you know, we can
45 catch up." And so, he did. And you know, talked a little bit more and he, he went on his way
46 where he was going. And so fast forward, like two months or what I, what happened I just, and

47 Debra you know me. Like I, my job and just kind of my life I am fortunate to know a lot of
48 people in this city and so, I told him. I was like, you know, “Dude, I know you trying to you
49 know, get back on track and all that. Call me so we can, try to get you hooked up with a job
50 whatever you want to do, what you trying to do with your life, let’s get it. Let’s make it happen.”
51 Right? And, and he’s like, “Alright.” And so, I can say fast-forward a few weeks, maybe a
52 month, had to be more than that, because I remember it had gotten a little cold, it was like fall.
53 And I was over my grandmother’s house again. And at that time, she had, we had a dog. It was
54 our whole family’s dog basically, lived there. And so I had taken him out to, to you know, do his
55 business and all that. And while I was doing that, I just looked at my phone, I looked across the
56 street and it was like, you know, maybe I should call [name]. And, and you maybe all, I don’t
57 know if you take his name out but, so I did. And didn’t get anything, just got a message or
58 whatever, I didn’t think nothing about it. So, I did that you know, I called him like every week or
59 two, just trying to get ahold of him. You know, I figured he might be working, doing whatever,
60 trying to you know, get back to, to life. And so I think, I might be wrong because it was still, so
61 maybe just a cold snap or something because I remember it was warm again and this is like,
62 maybe September or October, but I do remember it still being warm. And so, where my grandma
63 lives, lives there’s like a industrial road. It’s like, in a residential neighborhood. Anybody who
64 knows Milwaukee knows basically exactly what it’s like, the industrial corridor, it’s like on half
65 the neighborhood and the rest is residential whatever. And so, you know, unfortunately a lotta
66 Milwaukee people are going a little bit faster than they should be, sometimes. And this
67 gentleman was driving, and he was a narcoleptic. And so, he, we were in the house and we just
68 hear, “Boom!” And so, go outside and what happened is that he had passed out, fell asleep and
69 he hit the tree that was on the curb near my grandmother’s house. And thank God, you know, it

70 was a bad accident, but thank God everybody was alright. They took him and all that. But you
71 know, as things like that go, like when you know, something happens people come outside. So,
72 like half the block came outside. And after the paramedics had taken him and everything seemed
73 like it was going to be alright, I saw my friends' family, his aunt and I think both his aunts and
74 his uncle, they had gathered. And you know how everybody's just like, asking you know, "How
75 you doing?" and all that. And talking about what happened. And so, I asked them, I was like,
76 "Well, how, how is, is my guy doing?" Like, how, how's he doing? "I've been trying to call him
77 see what's up." And everybody got real quiet. And, and after a few, seemed like forever, but like
78 a few seconds probably it was, his aunt spoke up and she's like, "Well you know, he, he got
79 killed a couple months ago." And I was obviously just shocked and didn't know what to say,
80 think, whatever. And you know, if it was that soon, like, you know whatever I was feeling didn't
81 compare anything to what his family felt, his grandparents, his aunt and everything else. And so,
82 I just asked them what happened, and you know, they said he was, he owed somebody money.
83 And he was at a club or something you know, trying to enjoy himself and I guess he saw this
84 person and got scared because I guess, you know, he's somebody that just got out of prison,
85 probably didn't have a lot of money or any money at all. And so, he ran, and this person shot and
86 killed him. And you know, that was that. And so, you know, it's one of those things like, I think
87 you know, here in the city that's got all these, the top of every bad list you can imagine and you
88 know, my experience, I'm being blessed is to have been to you know, be able to get an
89 education, be able to have. You know, we weren't rich, aren't rich (laughter) and have a
90 relatively stable family environment. And him, basically the same. And we get to this point in
91 life you know, he gets locked up. You know, I'm going to college. We both get out our
92 respective institutions, you know, and I'm blessed to, have a good life and a decent job and you

93 know, be able to take care of myself and he did not have that. And then, you know, just be gone.
94 And you know how everything can be so much the same and then all of a sudden, ain't no, it's,
95 it's not. And so, you know, that you know, is something I definitely think about like, when I'm
96 doing the work that I do and when I hear, you know, the stuff that I hear. And you know Debra,
97 you I'm sure hear and see a lot of these things too. And you know, you think about it and it's just
98 like, "What choices lead both of those people to that moment?" Where, you know, basically both
99 of them life is probably over and his is, literally over. And the other person is probably locked up
100 for the rest of their life. And you know, how do we even get into those situations and, and you
101 know, what's the solution to them? You know, and you know me Debra, like, the solution's
102 definitely not having more cops and spending ridiculous amounts of money on that. But you
103 know, engaging people before they get to those points and, and helping them to learn how to deal
104 with all the things people are dealing with so that things like that don't happen.

105 D: I agree.

106 J: Yeah.

107 D: I know that it sort of bothered you how you went down one road, and he went down another.

108 J: Yeah.

109 D: Do you think there was something that could've been done to prevent him from his turn in the
110 road?

111 J: You see, that's the thing. Like, you know what? I don't really even know what turn he made.

112 Like, I really don't know. And it's, in a sense of like, experiences and other young people who
113 go through those types of things, then that for sure keeps people off that path. It's constant
114 intervention and constant community surrounding this person, so. You know, I was like I say,
115 blessed to, you know I had went to a high school that you know, that was, "You are going to

116 college.” Ain’t no two ways about it. And, “We’re going to do everything we can to make sure
117 you do that.” I had a mom who’s relatively militant and you know, she going to make sure that
118 that happened. And not to say that he didn’t have it because he had those things too. And so, for
119 whatever reason, for whatever happened, and I never actually went back and looked and see why
120 he was you know, incarcerated, but it doesn’t matter because the fact of the matter is is that he
121 didn’t have the same, at that point in life, either the same encouragement or the same opportunity
122 that I did to go and, and, and be, be around something different. And, and you know that, that,
123 you know, is one of those things that we, we got to do something about. And so, like, for other
124 situations like that, you know, what I see is that there’s no difference between you know, a
125 young kid around the corner here [in Borchert Field] and some kid you know, off Port
126 Washington and Whitefish Bay or Glendale except for the fact that that kid, you know, other
127 than their racial background or maybe even because of it and everything that we know of the
128 history of the city, has more opportunities, more community, more engagement in their well-
129 being than the young person over here, more than likely.

130 D: Right.

131 J: And so, you know, I can’t say that was the case with my friend because like I said, we literally
132 you know, grew up across the street from each other. And you know, families knew each other
133 and all, they still do. And everything from what I could tell, was the same up until this point. But
134 in the case of like, when it comes to violence and gun violence and violence period, it’s like, it’s
135 people not having the tools and opportunity to learn how to deal with stuff in a way that’s
136 healthy. And so, when you got, not just generations, but centuries of trauma in your family
137 environment and then on top of all that, or in addition to that, or maybe the cause of that, racism
138 and bigotry, that literally limits the physical environment that you can be in, the opportunities

139 that you have to, you know either go make a living or get to a place you can make a living, get an
140 education. That's where we are in this city. Like, there are, and this city is forty percent Black
141 and unfortunately, the vast majority of those folks are working class, working poor and so, that
142 didn't just happen because you know, that's a absolute lie to even say that you know, "Black
143 folks are lazy. They don't work as hard." Or they don't do whatever, and this is why this is like
144 that. No, this is all intentional: where the neighborhoods are, where people are, where all this
145 stuff is with opportunities being put, every bit of it's intentional even after this day. There's a
146 recent thing to happen with the state budget where basically, the homestead tax credit was only
147 going to be applied to people who are homeowners. And we know, you know, there's way, way
148 fewer after 2008, Black and people of color homeowners in this state then there were before.
149 And so, all the folks who've lost their houses and all that, wouldn't have mattered and then they
150 were also going to take it away from people who were renters, even though they you know, via
151 their, via their rent contribute to paying the taxes of whatever place they're living in. They
152 weren't going to be able to benefit from that anymore. And I don't actually know the current
153 status of that, I think it got one of the vetoes of the, the current governor that made was that. But
154 those are the types of things that they seem small, but they are major. You know, that's where
155 people start to build, you know, economic security again. That's where people start to use and
156 invest in their community again. And time after time, turn after turn, all these things are taken
157 away. And then you know, you, once again we talk about the cops taking that forty-seven
158 percent of everybody's you know, money put into tax rolls. You know, what could we do with
159 even twenty-five or thirty million dollars in the community? That is being sucked up by, you
160 know, that institution. And that's not to automatically say you know, everybody who is a part of
161 those places and, and you know, works that profession are bad because they absolutely are not.

162 But, you know, it's at a certain point and even you know, the past chief and the current chief,
163 they've both said this publicly that the police cannot do everything that the city needs. So, if
164 that's the case that means it's time for you to start giving up the resources so somebody else with
165 the skill and with the commitment, can. And unfortunately, we just haven't had the backbone
166 from the politicians to, to force that. And you know, obviously, that's not the only problem but
167 things like that, the disinvestment in the community, the fact that you know, we talk about
168 Milwaukee being on those lists saying, "This is the worst place to live for Black and people of
169 color." Once upon a time, it literally used to be the best. And none of this stuff is hard, it's like,
170 "Well, why was that?" People had jobs, education was accessible, people could take care of their
171 families, put um, you know, their kids through school. I always use you know, the example of
172 my cousin. My cousin got arrested, so he's much older than me. He was, he'd be in his eighties
173 now if he was still living.

174 D: Okay.

175 J: But the day he got back he got drafted like a lot of people did during Vietnam. And he was
176 super fortunate that he didn't ever get actually deployed to Vietnam, they just sent him to
177 Germany for training and the war was over by the time he got done, so they sent him back.

178 D: He was blessed.

179 J: He was super blessed. And the day he got back to Milwaukee he went to A.O. Smith, got a
180 job, worked there twenty-five, thirty years, paid for all his school—his kids school, built his, a
181 new garage and additions on his house for him and his wife, put his, help his kids put down
182 payments on their houses. And because of that, they're stable and they able to live a decent life
183 because they had that foundation. And most Black families had something like that before. And
184 so, this is why, and I'm not saying this to personally attack any politician or anything else, or

185 business people, but over the last thirty-five to forty years the business and political community
186 in Milwaukee has absolutely failed the Black community, period. And there's no, they know that
187 and we know that because we live it. But they didn't do what was necessary to be done, to be
188 getting people ready for what's next, to get the community ready for what's next, make the
189 investments they're going to make sure that people in the community got opportunity. They
190 didn't do any of that.

191 D: Right.

192 J: And because of that, we are where we are today. And then, you know, the blame is on them,
193 but it's also on us because we were you know, because things were so you know, reasonably
194 well, reasonably well for so long, stability, stable, we got too comfortable. We thought that
195 because things were just okay, you know, that that's good enough. And we didn't push even the
196 people who look like us that are politicians, we didn't push them at all saying, "You know what?
197 This is cool, but you can do better. Keep going." And because of that, and then on top of all the,
198 the crack epidemics and housing crises and recessions and in the Black community, depressions
199 that we've gone through, we've basically had two generations of young, Black people and people
200 of color in Milwaukee who do not know what stability in the Black community is like and that is
201 what causes the violence. That's what causes you know, folks to lash out and shoot. And you
202 know, just to be frank and I'm not to be like conspiracy theorists and all that, but you know, it's
203 cheaper to get a gun on the street of Milwaukee than it is to buy a cell phone. And you know,
204 that kind of stuff, you know it doesn't happen on accident, you know, there are you know, folks
205 profiting in different ways off of all of this stuff. When we talk about prisons, even though we
206 don't have de facto for-profit prisons in Wisconsin, there are definitely people making money off
207 doing the linens there. There are definitely people making money off building them. They're for,

208 juvenile, in the state of Wisconsin, the last numbers I seen, it's \$144,000 a year to keep a person
209 under eighteen locked up. And so, last I checked, in state tuition at UW-Milwaukee is \$9-10,000
210 a year. So, that's literally a four-year education, more than and a down payment on a house, or
211 entire house for many thousands of people. And so, we look at all this and we see that it's a
212 waste, we know that it's a waste, but because a lot of the powers to be aren't as affected as we
213 are, nothing gets done about it. And then on top of that, they're making money off of it.

214 D: Right.

215 J: And so, you know, we got a lot of work to do.

216 D: So, how could we turn that around?

217 (pause)

218 J: Well, you know, we sitting in an example of that and I don't, I'm not, I'm not like, some kind
219 of super capitalist that automatically, I think commerce and capitalism are two separate things. I
220 think you know, both can be beneficial but one in excess is a detriment. What we got now is a
221 system that capitalizes on the death and incarceration of people of color, but especially Black
222 people. And then now we look at what's going on in the country, we literally got concentration
223 camps for immigrants going on right now, people dying literally of pestilence and disease and
224 you know, politicians being okay with that. And what we're going to end up seeing is that it's
225 going to be just like Germany and places like that in the past. People are going to look back, it's
226 like, "No, that was horrible. What you did is horrible." And you know, those are crimes against
227 humanity. And so, that's where we are right now. But in the sense of making things better, you
228 know, the thing that's always been true is still true, people being engaged and forcing people in
229 office, people in the business community to do what's right is what it takes. There's a campaign
230 right now, called Liberate Milwaukee, which I'm fortunate to be a part of that you know, is

231 intentionally seeking to divest at least twenty-five million from policing to put it into community
232 focused efforts. There's things like, where we're sitting right now here in the Sherman Phoenix,
233 where you know, you know, relatively successful Black entrepreneurs and, and you know, white
234 ally partners said, "You know what? We're going to make something that works for everybody
235 in the community that's focused on the community, and we're going to build," and here we are,
236 sitting in this great place. It takes people you know, back to the basics again, talking to their
237 neighbors, being engaged with their neighbors, healing themselves and their neighbors and
238 neighborhoods, and not automatically assuming that everybody is the enemy because we're not.
239 Everybody's hurt and everybody's dealing with stuff and some much, much more than others,
240 but that being the case, the only way we can do anything about that is together. And so, I'm
241 encouraged to see you know, after so many tragedies whether it was something happened during
242 the Sherman Park uprising, whether it's you know, Seville Smith being murdered, whether it's
243 Dontre Hamilton being murdered, you know, countless other Black men and women losing their
244 lives because of state violence and otherwise violence. People are organizing and focused on
245 building something better because we all know that this ain't working.

246 (pause)

247 D: What would you say to our elected officials that you'd like to see changed to reduce gun
248 violence?

249 J: First and foremost is investing directly in the community. Like, there's no reason why, you
250 know, we can give you know, use tax incremental financing to fund developments for
251 developers, but not for community-focused organizations that are doing things for the city.
252 There's no reason why if we're paying \$300+ million per year, way over a billion dollars over
253 the one, probably about two billion actually, over the last ten years to, for policing in this city

254 that we can't take ten percent of that and invest in jobs, programs for young people. There's no
255 reason that any teenager in this city, should not be able to go to the city and say, "You know
256 what? I want a job, I want to help the community, I want to go. Send me to clean, send me to
257 paint, let me go you know, learn carpentry and fix the building, do something." And I got to be
258 careful, I don't like to curse, but they need to get on their p's and q's, get off their ass and make
259 it happen or else we need to move them out the way. That's all there is to it.

260 D: Right. That was good. (laughter) Is there anything you'd like to add?

261 J: You know, we just got to, we got to, we got to keep pushing. We got to you know, I'm one of
262 those people and I don't really care what people think about me or what I say, and I got that from
263 my mama, but you know, we need to challenge. If you going to take the time to run for public
264 office, you need to be ready to stand the heat and do the job. And if not, you need to move your
265 ass out the way, period. And that goes also for business leaders, you know, you're getting public
266 funds to invest in your enterprise. You owe, not you, you know, this investment whatever else,
267 no. You owe the community a benefit beyond your own, personal profit. And if you ain't doing
268 that, you don't deserve one dime, period.

269 D: Thank you.

270 J: You're welcome. (laughter) Yeah.

271 D: I knew your interview was going to be good! (laughter)

272 PART TWO:

273 J: Okay, well, you know it's, alright, and this wasn't really necessarily like nothing, thank God,
274 happened or I wouldn't be sitting here. But me and my mom were stopped at a gas station [in
275 Sunset Heights] right across from St. Joseph's, it's an empty field now. And I remember vividly,
276 I was like seven, eight or nine, like somewhere between there. So, I was on the passenger side

277 and my mom was driving, my uncle let her borrow his car. So, he had like I guess, I don't know,
278 I guess it was in demand. It was like a, like 1980s Oldsmobile, whatever the heck it was. And
279 you, you know, it was a decent car. But all that being the case, we were at the gas station and
280 these two young men walk up, or one of them walk up, walks up, and so, he's talking to my mom
281 and you know, ladies you all know this. Like, guys they try to hit on you, do all this kind of
282 stupid stuff they shouldn't be doing. But what he was doing was actually trying to distract her
283 and so as he was talking, my mom looks over into the rear-the side mirror. And I'm sitting over
284 there, I'm not even, I'm just looking like, "Who's this guy talking to my mom?" And she looks
285 in the side mirror and she sees there's somebody on their knees, kind of crawling around the car.
286 And so, she locks the door. I think she already had them locked. And so, (pause) he, the other
287 guy comes around the car and, and she you know, mother instinct, whatever it is, you know,
288 kicked in. And she's like, "Something's 'bout to go down." Right? And so, the other guy's trying
289 to check on my door handle trying to get out, get me out and open the door. And then the other
290 one you know, he pulls out a gun, shows it to her, is like, "Get out the car, get out the car!" And
291 she's like, I don't remember exactly what she said, because I'm just, but my mom said I was just
292 in a just kind of shock, just looking seeing what's going on, I'm a little kid at the time. And you
293 know, getting out. So, he drags her out of the car and gets in. And I just remember him holding
294 the gun up to the ceiling, he never pointed it at me. My mom I think thought he did. She was just
295 terrified obviously. And so, she's like, "Don't leave without my son." Basically, "Let him out
296 and then go." And so the guy was almost, because I was still just standing there, sitting there, just
297 watching him. I was like, "What the heck is going on? I never seen nothing like this." And I
298 don't even remember what I was thinking, but I do remember like, the guy, whoever he was, you
299 know, he almost was urging me as much as mom. Like, you know, "Dude, get out the car! Get

300 out the car!” You know, and he didn’t, I didn’t ever felt that he was going to hurt me personally.
301 My mom you know, being a mother trying to protect her kid you know, she definitely did. And
302 so, he finally like, unlocked the door, opened it, and I remember getting out or my mom pulling
303 me out, something like that. And then, I don’t even know if I’m remembering right. Maybe he
304 even drove off a little bit and then stopped and was like, “Get out the car, get out the car!” And
305 then I, I just remember being outside the car. And so, the other guy gets in, they drive off and my
306 mom, this is actually you know, I guess a good story about the police. This is like, early 90s, late
307 80s. And so, my mom runs in the gas station, she’s like, you know, “Call the police! These guys
308 just car jacked us.” Or whatever. And, and she’s like, you know, “My purse is in there, my
309 wallet, they know where my—”

310 D: Wow.

311 J: “—you know, where we live and they have the keys to my house and my other son’s at home.”
312 My older brother who was a teenager at the time, he’s like, probably, if I was nine, he was like
313 fifteen, sixteen. And she’s just worried that they were going to go, go in the house do whatever.
314 And so, you know, the cops come in one of those old kind of police vans, from the 80s. And I
315 remember meeting a lady cop and I think it was a guy, um, and one of them was white, but the
316 other one I think was like, Black or Latino or something, the lady was. I just remember them
317 being, you know, pretty nice and trying to calm us down. They even, like took us in, in the police
318 van home.

319 D: Good!

320 J: So, we could, you know, make sure everything’s good and all that. Fast-forward I don’t know,
321 hey, maybe it was like a month later, two months later and same gas station and it was more than
322 likely the same people.

323 D: Oh no.

324 J: Carjack somebody else. But I guess this time the police or somebody was nearby and you
325 know, my mom and me too always thought that must've been these two guys and they, they were
326 killed. Shot and killed.

327 D: Oh my God. And so, um, so I remember that vividly even though, you know. And even like, I
328 remember like, crying just because you know, being a kid and all this going on, it's just like, but
329 I don't remember. You know, they, you know they, they were, they offered me counseling and
330 all this stuff and I was like, "Yeah, I'm cool." And not to like, make light of it, but like, you
331 know, it was, I really was. And it was, traumatic but like, you know, I think my mom was
332 probably more traumatized than I was. Um, we had, you know, that is you know, kind of the
333 beginning of like, when stuff kind of went downhill a little bit in Milwaukee. And stayed that
334 way you know, for a while, at least through the, the 90s with the crack epidemic and, and, and
335 then you know, also all the you know, mass incarceration that, that you know, happened under
336 both political parties, locking up Black people. And here we are twenty years later and, twenty-
337 five years later, whatever it is, and the same parallel situation happening with the heroin
338 epidemic. But because it's affecting different types of people, everything's about trauma-
339 informed care, everything's about counseling and addiction you know, help and all that.

340 D: Right.

341 J: When you know, literally thousands of people who look like us didn't get that. So, yeah.

342 (pause) Yeah. (laughter)

343 D: (inaudible) I didn't even know that.

344 J: Oh, yeah.

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

346 J: No, I think this, that's probably it. (laughter)

347 D: (inaudible) You are so right.