

1 GVP67, Camille Mays

2 D: Okay, so, I'm pretty sure that it was recorded well on the permission for the, for the gun
3 violence, let me say it correctly, informed consent and research participation. And am I correct in
4 saying that you agree to participate, we can show your likeness, share your son's photo and that
5 you are willing to participate in the documentary?

6 C: Yes.

7 D: Great. Also, I just want to, kind of go over this story because when you hear how active you
8 were in the community and this happens, I just want to make sure that everybody gets it. Don't
9 worry, my voice is going to be deleted. It's going to be just all your vocals, not mine.

10 C: Okay.

11 D: So, now tell me a little bit about yourself. Tell me who you are.

12 C: (pause) Oh, I am a mother.

13 D: Okay.

14 C: I'd say I am an empath. (pause) I am a nurturer. And I'm just finding my space and
15 mindfulness right now. And just want to share my experience with other people, I've
16 experienced trauma my whole life. And I've found ways to grow past it, to each phase and I
17 think that our community needs to break mental stigmas and focus on mental wellness instead of
18 mental illness.

19 D: Okay. And what is your gender and your age?

20 C: I'm a woman and I'm forty-three.

21 D: Okay, and where do you live?

22 C: I live in Sherman Park.

23 D: And how long have you lived there?

24 C: I've lived in Sherman Park, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for almost ten years.

25 D: Oh, wow.

26 C: We're pushing ten years soon. But I'm from the Lindsay Heights neighborhood.

27 D: So, you have experienced gun violence. Could you share with me your story?

28 C: Yes. So, I did a lot of community work in the city, citywide, grassroots level, a lot of
29 community building, bridging the gap between community organizations, larger organizations
30 and grassroots. Worked a lot with homicide victims and helping them to be able to process
31 through Peace Garden Project MKE. And I started that in 2015. And I started that because
32 homicides went up quite a bit in 2015. Around 69%. It increased from 2014 and with some of the
33 bonds and relationships and bridges built, a lot of the people on the ground ended up doing a lot
34 of extensive work in the community, a lot of people, with the uprising and that happened in
35 2016, wanted to get that village back and build that sense of community more. And so, what you
36 saw was a lot of grassroots initiatives and community building that started working to decrease a
37 lot of the bond and reduce things and transform spaces into safer spaces. More comfortable
38 spaces, where people felt okay to come outside more. (pause) And so, as we continue to build
39 those things and start moving the torch, changing the city in a different direction, we still face
40 challenges. And in 2019, in November, I ended up losing my son to homicide. And I ended up
41 being on the other end of the work that I did.

42 D: Wow. What was your son's name?

43 C: Darnell Woodard. I called him Buka. And he was twenty-one years old and he was the second
44 of three sons. And really, the focus of why I did the work I did, I wanted to make sure that my
45 son did not become a statistic, a negative one. And I wanted to make sure that all of the things I
46 did, I can make it better for them and for other people coming up after me.

47 D: Were you angry with the community after you, the murder of your son?

48 C: Yeah, and since I felt like I poured my heart into the streets and the streets didn't show love
49 back. I still am torn with that, like, I don't have a sense of love for my old neighborhood when I
50 go there because my son was killed by a childhood friend from that neighborhood. So, you
51 know, when people go back home, you know, they, they're happy. They feel, you know, a
52 nostalgic feeling, but now it's like a bad taste in my mouth when I go through there. I don't feel
53 comfortable. I don't feel safe. Because I know the people who murdered my son, and their
54 people are down there too. And now, you know, it's probably a divide, too. And so, it's just
55 uncomfortable now, where it was once very comfortable (inaudible). And then I'm upset more
56 with the city and just the state of this, what the city is in. If more efforts like mine, and the people
57 who I work with in the community on the ground and our initiatives and efforts were supported
58 more, I feel like maybe his death could've been prevented. Maybe I could've supported him
59 better. Maybe, the state of the city, our city would be safer. Our neighborhoods that we often
60 complain about, especially the area where he was killed, maybe that wouldn't have happened
61 there.

62 D: When—

63 C: I just feel like, you know, the city has been doing a lot of the same things that haven't been
64 working for a long time.

65 D: Do you think that the project that you were involved in, were you able to bring it to that
66 community?

67 C: Yes. I've done Peace Garden projects. I actually worked with an artist, Tia Richardson who
68 did a mural just blocks away of community building and peace and, and, you know, not doing
69 these things, and restoring and rebuilding a community and a resilience of it. And the goal, you
70 know, we often say "Stop the Violence." The violence won't stop, but we definitely can do
71 things to reduce it. We saw this with the pandemic, our initiative to reduce homicides slightly
72 each year, up until the pandemic when people weren't able to do the outreach.

73 D: So, would you say that the key is, what did you discover during the pandemic?

74 C: Well, the key is outreach. The key is people on the ground having access to people and people
75 having access to those outreaches and resources and schools and breaks and help for their
76 mental, mindful, wellbeing and wellness. And to give them a better quality of life overall, right?
77 And to improve the environment. Because healthy neighborhoods are healthy people and healthy
78 neighbors.

79 D: Okay. Describe what happened to your son, to the best of your knowledge, the day he was
80 murdered.

81 C: He was with a friend and he met with some other friends who ultimately set him up and
82 murdered him. The people who murdered him were childhood friends. They had two or three
83 individuals, and something that really frustrates me about his murder is that one of the young
84 men who murdered him was under a long-term drug investigation. And while he was on that

85 long-term drug investigation, on parole for robbery, he ultimately robbed and murdered my son.
86 He was picked up seven days later. Not for the drug investigation or the murder of my son and
87 ultimately being charged with the murder of my son, the drug and gun charges that were a result
88 of that long-term drug investigation. The charges ended up going on one of the murderer's
89 girlfriend. And then they were dismissed. And she got very little jail time. And you know, the
90 long-term drug investigation that allowed him to be out on the streets, because they were
91 investigating they, they knew he was doing illegal acts on parole, but instead of him being in jail,
92 he was out and he murdered my son. So, I'm very upset with the system. (pause) And it makes
93 me wonder how many people die while they're doing these investigations to build their case.
94 And in my son's, you know, in this situation, the charges were dismissed anyway.

95 D: Oh my God. So, what do you think could have been done that could've avoided the death of
96 your son? I should say the murder of your son. (pause) Camille? Camille?

97 C: Oh, yes. What they need to do, what needs to be done, is they need to just start locking up
98 these menaces right away. You know, what's hard for me to understand is how so many innocent
99 people and police brutalities (inaudible), but how so many murderers and people committing
100 these heinous crimes walk the streets free. It's like they're going after the wrong set of people.
101 And it's just so hard for me to understand how somebody you know, out on robbery, parole, you
102 know, can be allowed to then rob and murder. It's like, it just got worse. Some people just need
103 to be in jail. So, I think we really need to look at the system.

104 D: What would you say to elected officials? What would you like to say to elected officials about
105 gun violence?

106 C: I would like for elected officials to really sit down and take a look at the statistics of the gun
107 violence. How many go unsolved? And how many when they do go, how many of those people
108 committed other murders? How many of them weren't supposed to have, you know, those
109 weapons? How many of them, you know, the people and they're knowing people, and looking at
110 where these things are happening at and looking at how these things systemically were handed
111 down. How our neighborhoods are boxed into poverty and dilapidation and hopelessness. And
112 how we can really look at how we can improve the communities and how that impacts crime.
113 Really take a look at that under a different lens.

114 D: When you say that, in the path they keep redoing the same old thing, what would be the
115 different lens?

116 C: The different lens, it's a lot of times, it's just like a who knows who and what they're
117 comfortable with and how they're comfortable doing things or the processes for how things get
118 done and who the leadership really is. The leadership and the power, should I say, should be
119 exchanged to the people and to the people on the ground and it should be shifted instead of just
120 the city officials thinking that they're the only experts. The people are experts. And they need to
121 really listen to the people and not just do things, a one-and-done, but do things consistently.
122 Sustain things that have worked. And try things different. Look at what has been working and
123 what's been impactful by the people in the neighborhood, who the people trust, who the people
124 are working with, building those relationships.

125 D: You said that you presently live in the Sherman Park area. But your son was murdered in a, in
126 a different community? Or in the Sherman Park community?

127 C: No, in the same community that we live in, actually four blocks from my home. Actually, in a
128 trouble spot, that we already, a lot of community members have complained and talked about,
129 across the street from my neighborhood high school. A lot of traffic, just making me think how
130 people can do more too. People can, if they see something, say something, more. Really hold
131 elected officials and business owners accountable for improving conditions of things, and really
132 holding elected officials and police accountable for how they police. And just really, a lot of
133 people in the community complain about a lot of things, but they don't take action to do things
134 differently, too. But then they don't have the trust of the police and the elected officials, so I say,
135 the police and the elected officials need to start by building better relationships and trust with the
136 people. They can only do that by being on the ground, being out in the community, building
137 trust. Admitting that these obstacles exist first, so that we can work through them.

138 D: How has the murder of your son affected you, your family and the community?

139 C: I think it's affected the community because I'm not out doing, I'm out doing the work but in a
140 different capacity. And so, I think that our work as organizers is affected by the pandemic, first.
141 So, we're not able to impact the community. We're doing this from a distance. For me, I think
142 that with organizing and activism, what I'm learning in my process is that it's okay to put the
143 cape down. It's okay to not be okay. It's okay to not rush to everything. You can't have the same
144 group of people doing everything. And that I have to hold my space and my value, and not worry
145 about if it's lost while I step back. And that I have to allow myself time to heal and that, the best
146 place for me to do it is fight when I can, when I want, and what I want to fight. So, I've been
147 taking on things, but I've been taking on things that help with the healing process, allowing me
148 to have a voice. And my story and what happened, and also motivating and empowering,

149 motivating and inspiring other people to do it. Inspiring other people to break the mental stigma
150 and to focus on the wellness part.

151 D: How has it affected your family?

152 C: It's been a breakdown and everything. I mean, it's affected us because it slowed us down
153 while I was stalling and (inaudible) me down, it's a struggle everyday to do things that are
154 normally easy for all of us. We have a hard time focusing. It affects us because times are happy
155 and sad. Like, we had a birth of a baby in the family. And I was really, really happy. But every
156 time it's a happy moment, it's kind of, going to be bittersweet. Every time there's a celebration, a
157 wedding, anything happy for us, it'll always be sad because Buka's not here. And we'll never
158 forget that he's not here.

159 D: Wow.

160 C: And then, like, we got little ones who don't understand. Like, they know he's not here, but
161 they don't understand where he is. And then you have, we've had losses since him and it hasn't
162 even been a year. So, it's just like trauma on top of trauma. And then, it's like a sense of fear you
163 know, I don't know what they're experiencing with that, but a sense of fear because I'm out, I'm
164 very out here in the streets and now I have, like, new enemies in a sense, maybe, because they,
165 you know, they did that to him. They have people, they have family. I'm very visible. People
166 know who I am, it makes me concerned. (pause) And then like, it's just a struggle. You can't
167 turn it on and off, you never know when it's going to come. It's a lot of triggers. Music, movies,
168 people in real life, just things that make you think back of moments, memories. Some days you
169 can look at pictures and videos and happy, just, you know you're happy just to look at them. And
170 there are other days you're sad. I find myself, you know, finding peace with the Peace Garden

171 and, and things that I do in honor of him. But then sad that I have to memorialize him in that
172 way, that he's not here. And I think that each one of us individually feels like no one
173 understands, because we all have a different perspective in what relationship we had with him.
174 (pause) And so, I just think it's really challenging and hard and harder than I can even express
175 into words. And I don't know myself, some days how I, you know, will have the strength to do
176 what I do.

177 D: You said that, (pause) wow. You said that the person who murdered him was apprehended,
178 but you also mentioned about additional enemies. Do you feel that everyone who was involved
179 in murdering him was caught, or no?

180 C: No. Three people were involved and two were caught. So, there's still somebody out there.
181 And I think that a lot of people don't understand that aspect. For me, a lot of people think I found
182 justice, but there's still one person out there. And then I also have like, a survivor's guilt talking
183 to other parents and families because they don't have people in their cases and some of them
184 have been years. And they don't know who did it, and they could be walking past them on the
185 street. And I feel bad because they don't even know a piece of it. And at least I have a piece. But
186 then, I still feel like I don't have it all and then everybody, we say "justice", or whatever, but it's
187 never really any justice because we don't get them back. And then—

188 D: Then either take him out with you or put him back in the back. You're making too much
189 noise.

190 C: (inaudible) And I just feel like, you know, you have, you want to think about, you know, these
191 young men, they're young and we don't have the death penalty, do they get second chances? Do
192 you forgive? Do you? You know, but then you look at people, robbery, robbery-murder. What

193 would they do next? Some people are just bad. You know, they didn't catch one from my son's
194 murder or the investigation, it was something else. Maybe somebody else who would've died.
195 And the other one they caught on a high-speed chase. So, he killed my son, who knows what else
196 he did in between, and then he took a high-speed chaser, where there's hundreds of lives on the
197 freeway. It's like, do you have people who are just rotten to the core? Some people don't get
198 better. You know, so it's just a lot of thoughts. And I'm thinking with me being everything I am
199 in the city, and I said I have a good support system, I know a lot of people have relationship
200 problems, friendship problems, family problems. I've been blessed to have a good fiancé, a good
201 set of friends, people in the community who have been there, but it's not like you would think.
202 We've struggled through things, times, mentally, physically, financially. And it's a lot of people
203 who disappear after the funeral, at two weeks later I call it, two weeks after, it's different. All
204 those people aren't around. All those people not available in the morning or the middle of the
205 night, all those people not helping out. And a lot of those families are still struggling. And I look
206 back, if this is my experience, imagine theirs. They don't do all of what I do, (inaudible) and then
207 was like, you know, I just felt bad for other people, it's just sad. The support out here.

208 D: When you, what would you say to parents or a parent who has lost a child to gun violence and
209 does not have the support that you have, or if they're being told that, "Get over it, you're not
210 going to bring him back," or her back?

211 C: They still have to always live through us. So, that it's not in vain, they wouldn't want us to
212 stop life. And the very thing that stops us and brings us down got to be what keeps us moving
213 and motivate us. And it's much easier said than done.

214 D: Amen.

215 C: But we have to fight for them and so that other people aren't like us, and to move other people
216 so that they can feel why they should make a change. And so that we're not just a news story. Be
217 the person, be the person that they can connect with. Tell the story, share the experience so other
218 people don't want others to go through it and so that they step up. Be somebody's strength.

219 D: You said a poem earlier today. Something that had come across your desk, could you read
220 that? (pause)

221 C: (inaudible) find it. (pause) I'm pulling it up now.

222 D: That was powerful.

223 C: (pause) Just one second.

224 D: Sure. (pause)

225 C: Alright, bear with me for one second.

226 D: Oh, of course. (pause) Did you, while you're looking, did you sense, Camille, that something
227 was going to happen to him before he was murdered?

228 C: Yeah.

229 D: What, what happened that made you sense something was going to happen to him?

230 C: I had a dream at his funeral.

231 D: The day before he was murdered?

232 C: Oh, no. The day before he was murdered, that night I had a dream that he was on the ground
233 reaching for me.

234 D: That he was on the what?

235 C: On the ground, reaching for me.

236 D: Oh, wow. (pause) And then before that you had a dream of his murder?

237 C: I had a dream that I was at his funeral and I thought I was like, fearful, just scared for what
238 was going to happen or whatever. And, but yeah, I thought back about it, that's the first thing I
239 thought about when it happened.

240 D: Wow. Did he express anything that he felt, before he was murdered?

241 C: Yeah. He was talking like he really was like, "I'm tired" or whatever, his friends said stuff to
242 me. He, I never, heard it, but I saw stuff later and they told me stuff later, so it was like, really
243 scary. Like right before that happened, me and him both were feeling like a way, and I didn't
244 know he was feeling that way and he didn't know I was feeling whatever way. It was real creepy
245 afterward, to find that out. So, yeah. It's just strange how it all goes. It's strange how it all works
246 out. Yeah, so, you know, we just, we never unpacked. We always keep going day to day and I
247 think I'm trying to take our day-to-day and our activities that we do with our people, and we say
248 that we don't take things for granted. And we say, "Don't take things for granted," but even in
249 that, we still take time and people for granted. We don't mean to do it, but we end up doing it
250 over and over again. And so, you know, I've just thought about that, so now, I try not to rush
251 through my day and not to rush through, not to rush through you know, just everything. Because
252 we would jump around from meeting to meeting, activity to activity, and then we would not, you
253 know, just process today. We just wouldn't process our day and so, I try to be more mindful of
254 that, even if I just take a minute you know, and each day, a couple times, one time in the day,
255 you know, before I go to sleep or whatever, I try to just sit and really bring in and focus in and
256 process what's going on and what direction I want to go. And that's kind of what this statement

257 is, you know, that I read to you. And now I'll read it to you and I'll tell you what my response
258 was in a post that my friend, who lost her mother out here, doing a lot of work in community.
259 Markasa Tucker. We went to high school, Rufus King, and she put up a post the other day. And
260 it says, "What do black women need to unlearn to move closer to healing and pleasure?" Two
261 things we are, I think black women need to unlearn the pattern of martyrdom. The pattern that
262 says that we must always overwork ourselves to consider ourselves, even showing up
263 appropriately. I see this all the time in movement work. I will go to a meeting and then the same
264 five black women who are signed up on every single list to do every single task. I'm like, "I
265 know y'all are brilliant and I know you can do all of it, but how do we start to make a movement
266 culture in which the workload is truly shared?" I mean, one of the deepest wounds of
267 colonization and (inaudible) slavery is there's constant work that we need to be doing to earn our
268 right to exist in any way. So, that still is like, one piece. What would you say to black women
269 who have a hard time takin' a break? Even when people are just a wreck, it's still resistance of
270 fear, right? That scares me. That's the sense of, if I step away maybe I'll be replaced or
271 forgotten. Maybe my place and my movement is not going to be hell for me. That is one of the
272 ways that capitalism gets into our hearts, the feeling of, "I don't deserve the rest. I have to keep
273 working until someone else says, 'You get two weeks, now.'" We have to unlearn that. When I
274 think of pleasure, I also think of freedom. What does women black liberation for black women
275 look like to you? It looks like a ton of laughter and being able to trust each other, trusting that
276 there's an abundance of resources that we don't have to fight amongst each other for them. Trust
277 in each other to have each other's backs when we are, when harm happens. Trusting that we can
278 recover from harm together. Trusting that we don't have to build ourselves around anger or
279 bitterness. And that was from Adrienne Maree Brown, on Facebook. And so, my answer, there

280 was a lotta good answers that we all unpacked, but my response to that was, when I stopped
281 doing stuff, I felt the anxiety. So, I came to realize that I cannot worry about my deeds or who
282 values me right now. That I need clarity to focus on my purpose and what allows me time and
283 space to unpack mentally, daily. Maybe multiple times, if I need. It is okay not to be okay and to
284 do nothing if I need. I need to focus more on value to self. And it starts with self-care. Someone,
285 someone told me after Buka, like, anytime, any day, whatever I need to do or not to do, that it's
286 okay. And it is okay. And slowly, I'm starting not to feel anxiety when I pause, when I stop
287 everything.

288 D: That's deep. That's good that you're at that place too. Is there anything you'd like to add to
289 today's recording?

290 C: No, ma'am. That's it, I'm glad the second time around went good.

291 D: Me too. Yeah, I mean, I heard some of it for the first recording, but some of it, the static was
292 just too heavy, and you were saying such good stuff, I didn't want to miss it.

293 C: Okay. (laughter) I repeated some of the good stuff.

294 D: You repeated all of the good stuff that I could hear. Whatever I missed, I can't help that
295 because of the static, but everything, as you were telling and sharing the story, I'm like, "I can't
296 miss it." So, that's why I purposefully ran and just changed equipment.

297 C: Yes, well, I appreciate it. Thank you for hearing my story and thank you for sharing it.

298 D: Oh, thank you for telling your story. And thank you for sharing it in such a powerful way.

299 C: Thank you. Let me know when it goes on. Greg says, "Hi!"

300 D: What will happen is it will go to UWM, and then UWM will have a, one of the interns write
301 the transcript. That'll come to you via email. And then, you approve it. And then we will include
302 that with the, this edited version of the story. You know, improving the sound and everything.
303 And then it'll go on YouTube and on our webpage. And we'll be using it in the future in our
304 other promotionals, as well, too.

305 C: Okay.

306 D: So, as soon as all those things happen, we'll definitely share that with you.

307 C: Okay, thank you.

308 D: No, thank you!

309 C: Greg say 'Hi!' Ms. Deb.

310 D: (laughter) Tell him I said, "Hello!"

311 C: Okay.

312 D: And I enjoyed the event, thank you again for inviting me.

313 C: Thank you. I'm glad that you were able to talk earlier and I'm going to look into that and then
314 also, I'm glad that y'all were able to connect—

315 PART TWO 3:44

316 C: (inaudible) those videos going to look different to now, when they parked and then got killed
317 with a gun. How they don't feel—

318 D: Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait! This part right here, this is good. Can I record this?

319 C: Yes.

320 D: Okay, go ahead.

321 C: You know, like, someone today who loses their loved one to gun violence, they need to know
322 things. They don't have people out there. You know, people reaching out with therapy and this,
323 that, and other, but they don't tell them when they're watching movies, it's going to be a
324 different way. Even some of their favorite movies, when they're listening to some of those songs
325 or watching videos, or when they hear gun shots or fireworks, they're going to jump in a whole
326 different way or feel another way, they might break down to tears. It's going to affect them a
327 different way. A lot of triggers that you don't even think about, to address. No one's there
328 (inaudible). One day, something might bother you and the next, it might not bother you in that
329 way. You never know when they're going to go off. But it's very important to know triggers. We
330 don't know triggers until we experience it. No one knows or thinks about that until they
331 experience it. Nobody knows what to tell a family member, everybody thinks about the loss, they
332 don't know about the trauma they're both are going to feel when they're walking through the
333 streets. Of not knowing who killed their loved one. They don't know the trauma and the fear that
334 some people have to come out of the house, because they were the survivor and maybe the
335 person they were with died. (pause) They, some people feel like they might want to come finish
336 them. You know, so, people don't know about the struggles, the day to day things that people go
337 through behind gun violence. (pause)

338 D: Did you, was that it? I didn't want to say nothing because it's your recording, I don't want to,
339 I didn't want to step in (laughter). But you are so right.

340 C: Yeah, after Buka died, we went to go see Queen & Slim and we basically, I didn't ever see
341 the end of Queen & Slim. And I probably still can't even watch it even though I think it's a
342 really dope movie. Because of what happened in the end, where we walked out, or up until the

343 point where we walked out. It's the part where, you know, basically they, they shoot them. A lot.
344 And basically, kill him, and so, we had to get up and walk out. I couldn't do it. And now, you
345 know me and him were saying later, I was thinking, "What was I thinking about? Going to see
346 that movie thinking it wouldn't bother me?" And, you know, when I turn off certain movies and
347 stuff, I think, "What was I thinking about, starting to watch that?" And then, we were just talking
348 about how much violence is in stuff. And, you never realize until something's happened. (pause).
349 By how much it is, it's just natural to us, we just watch it all over the place. (Inaudible) It's just
350 really a violent world, the gangs, everything.

351 D: You are so right. I—