

Manhole Cover Project: A Gun Legacy 1996

Testimonial Sequence C: Youth 1

MARY JO ELLIOTT

And then he asked my brother for his wallet, my brother said he only had two dollars in his wallet, and, and then he shot my brother in the chest, next to his heart. And then the ambulance came. They brought my brother to the hospital; they told my mother that he wasn't going to live. And he got killed over two dollars. And then the man wasn't caught for five years, straight. And they gave him, the guy a hundred and forty years I think. We went through a lot during them five years. We went through a lot during them five years. On the day when he died, we go to the cemetery, we leave flowers on his gravesite and talk to him and things. I know we can't see him or whatever but we hurtin', really hurtin'. I lost a brother somebody I'm a never get back again y'know? I didn't think about nothin' I just ran directly to my mother. And when I got to my mother...she was like "Your brother's dead." and I was like "What you mean, what is dead?" and she said "He gone, forever." I asked her "What happened?" and she said "He got shot in the he said "He got in the heart over two dollars. At his job." For like two months straight, my mother sit in the same spot when she found out when he died. She was sittin' on the couch, she'd never move from that spot two months straight. Thinkin' about my brother. She stopped working, she stopped doing everything. Then she caught a heart condition. It was almost like I lost my mother. I didn't lose her as far as death go but I lost her. I was her baby. It was like she wasn't even there. Sittin' there hurtin' all day.

TONY KARDULIS

The most emotional one was...December 30th, 1990 and it was on Farmington Avenue at Oxford Street. Want me to get the whole story? Well, it was my nephew Melvin Kardulis, my mother, and myself, we were on our way to the laundry mat, so we stopped at the local convenience store to purchase soap powder. And I went to return the video so we drive up to the plaza. My mother stays in the car. Melvin and I we get out. Melvin goes to the store to get the soap, I go to the video store, return the video. Saw Melvin was still in line and went in to meet him. Noticed, a group of kids in the store over to the left, playing these video games. I noticed they was looking or staring, which is no big deal. So we made our selection; we stood in line. Then the kids, about maybe five kids approached us. Then I asked Melvin: did he know these kids?. Melvin said, "Naw, I don't know those kids." I said to the kids who were talking, "Hey why don't you just go head with that junk, you know we don't need no trouble over here. Why don't you just go head. They said, "Naw, naw, naw". They became a little loud where the store manager asked those kids to leave the store. And they yelled, "Yeah I'll be outside, I'll be outside waiting." And they was, so we stepped outside. There were no words said, one of the kids just rushed my nephew, grabbed him and started in a tussle. Me, I ran over and kicked the kid off Melvin. One of the other kids wearing a hoody, he reached in his pocket and came out with a twenty-five and just started shooting in my direction and Melvin's direction. Melvin got hit three times once in his neck, lung, and kidney. I got shot. I got one in my collar bone and the other one in my arm. That's what happened.

MARY JO ELLIOTT

Me and my mother was going through a lot and we was getting to the point where we couldn't take each other no more. So I had met these people and they was like they hung around with 20-Love and everything. They said they was a family so I started to hang around them. I mean I didn't like they habits or whatever, but it seemed like it was the only thing to do at the moment so I had got down with a gang. We was doing all kinds of bad things but I never shot nobody, or anything like that.

TONY KARDULIS

After I got shot, my only concern at that point was Melvin, I wasn't even aware I was shot. I didn't even feel it. I wasn't even thinking about me. My concern was saving my nephew so I had no knowledge that I was shot, at all. Didn't even know. I don't know if I have any words that could describe the way I felt; grief, anger, sick; I felt numb. You know man, there was a lot of things going on. Then watching my mother hold my nephew, she's crying, I was feeling for her. Then back to anger. I don't blame anyone. I don't think it was a situation of blame. I think it was more of a situation of stupidity in these young kids' minds. They thought they was, they made a right decision...but evidently they didn't.

MARY JO ELLIOTT

They made it seem like it was a bunch of brothers and sisters, you know, getting together and being there for each other through anything but it wasn't nothing like that. I mean the way they used to beat up on people, it was like more like pain than love to me. Then when I went down to juvenile it was over, I mean everybody that I was rolling with never came to see me or write me or even think about me. It was like they left me when things got hard for me, and I don't call that a family. The gang ain't no good, ain't no good. All they want to do is sell drugs, smoke drugs and eventually kill a couple of people down the line like it was no problem. I mean, I had to get out of there. As far as them being a family. No family. I think they was a bunch of children that got lost down the line, prom some, you know. Somebody took my brother, my mother fading away and I got a child and I'm only 13, I didn't care. I didn't care.

TONY KARDULIS

I had such rage in me. The number one thing in my mind was: I got to kill these kids. I'm about to kill somebody. Mentally I'm ready to do this, but I knew that would not bring Melvin back, and it would be a triple tragedy. Melvin's gone. The kid who killed Melvin, and tried to kill me, was sixteen when he committed the crime, seventeen when he got sentenced. That's a tragedy. He's spending damn near most of his life in prison, now. And if I'd had killed him then I'm gonna do twenty-five to life. So that's a triple tragedy.

ANTONIO NEGRON

A couple of guys that, that he got involved with a long time ago, saw him, caught him, from behind like covered his head with like a bag. And they ended up shooting him in the head, from behind. But it seems from that point, another friend of mine that I know his name is Baby, they call him Baby. He ended up wanting to get revenge for Chino's death, a good friend of his. So he ended up finding the guy's brother. There was a guy that killed him, but he ended up not finding the guy, but he found the guy's brother. What he ended up doing was, the brother had nothing to do with it, but he killed him anyway. The same way they killed his friend, put the bag

over the guy's head and shot him from behind, in the head. Just because, y'know, and that kid had nothing to do with it. The thing that was runnin' through my head was, "When I catch this guy, this guy is dead, when I find this guy his, his ass is mine," y'know what I mean, It was nuthin' about bein' like, "Oh I'm gonna' stop doin' this, this is too much." Beause like I told you, in New York it's to fast. That's one of the reasons I why I'm here in Hartford Connecticut. Since I moved here, I, trust me I'm a totally different, I'm a reverse of the person that I used to be in New York. As a matter of fact I never thought I can be this type of person thank God I am. I like it.

DAVID SEGGARA

I was effected by guns two years ago on May 12, 1994 when I was caught in a gang cross fire that was shot in my right leg. I was an innocent by stander. I did not know what was going on at that time. I was coming home from school and the riot broke and I got caught in my leg - I have two bullet wounds there. I was coming home from school, like a normal day, it was sunny outside and the weather was great, like always. I crossed the street and right there and then, when I crossed the street, I heard voices, people screaming and I turned around and that's where all the bullets was coming at. They were going everywhere from different places, right, left, up, down and I looked to the left to see if my friend was all right and she jumped to the ground and I panicked because I thought the bullets were firecrackers, at that time I'd never seen bullets before so I ran toward the ground and that's when the bullet caught me in the right leg. From there on I started screaming to my friend, "I got shot, I got shot, roll out." She thought I was playing because she couldn't see the blood, because I put down my pant and right there and then I grabbed a light pole that was nearby and she saw me on the bus and I lifted up my leg pant and everybody started screaming because they seen me with all that blood. She ran towards me and a car almost hit her and right there and then she grabbed me and I grabbed her around the shoulders and she started walking me home. My mother was out on the porch and she just turned crazy, started screaming and fell on her knees and started screaming to God. They took me to the hospital and from the hospital I was released home the same day.

MARY JO ELLIOTT

And I am thinking anybody who rolled up on me I'm going to shoot. I mean the same man tied into this man had when he took my brother, you know. I looked at the gun, this ain't even me. What have I got this for, what am I going to do with this, you know. So I woke up and I gave it to my brother, I'm like here, take this from me, because I learned that a gun don't make you a person. It don't make you somebody, especially when you are feeling like you wasn't. But it don't make you nobody somebody, especially when you are feeling like you wasn't. But it don't make you nobody, it just makes you the same person, even worser, even stupider. Protect yourself. If you want to protect yourself? Stay off the streets. That is the best way to protect yourself, just stay away from all of that. The gun didn't me no good.

TONY KARDULIS

Guns don't kill people, people kill people. It's definitely on the person. It took a person to load the hand gun, point it, and discharge the weapon intentionally. And hand guns are manufactured specifically for people. It's a hand gun that kills people. That's its only function.

MARY JO ELLIOTT

Me and my brother was walkin' past this building, next door to us and soon as we passed by the steps they started shooting, they shot three boys. They shot three boys. They didn't die, but they got shot. I thought about it. What if I was still standing there? What if we was still walking past that building? I would've got shot too. There's a lot of kids that be left behind, a lot of family members that be left behind too, hurtin'. Over a gun, and takin' somebody life.

DAVID SEGGARA

How could they just shoot some one for no plain simple reason. Second of all why do they have to use weapons? Back in the days my father always used to tell me that people used to fight with hands and not weapons. I don't know what this is coming to, but for me it seems that we're all going too kill each other based on it. Because in Hartford there's a lot of deaths of teenagers and basically it is due to weapons.

MARY JO ELLIOTT

There used to be these two twins, Derrick and Davron, they used to live around the corner. One day they all was in the house and they was playing with these guns and cleaning them, or whatever. One of the guns accidentally went off and shot him in his eye and he died. I was alright with him too, but then I thought about it. He was only what, he was like my age around 16 or 17. He didn't have no gun, I mean he wasn't doin' nothing. The other twin he was into a lot of this bad stuff and all them guys that was there, even his own boy shot his brother, you know, but the other twin, the one that got shot, he was into all that. He was in school and everything and he got shot right in his head, just for sitting there.

DAVID SEGGARA

I can't walk alone. I'm just scared cause I think I might get shot again, get caught in the cross-fire. Guns should be controlled, the man who created them should have never created them in the first place.

MARY JO ELLIOTT

I had just saw him that day and I told him to stay out of trouble. He was like, "Yeah, all right." Later on that night he had got with some of his friends and they went to go rob this guy for a chain and when they went over there the guy had put him a headlock and popped him in the mouth. Then his friend drove off about to leave him he was yelling for him and whatever. Then he got popped in the back, too. The dude that shot him, he shot him too but he was in critical condition. When they was driving around with him in the car because they didn't know what to do. They went and left him on the curb at the hospital and they drove off. They was driving around for like half an hour with him in the car, so he didn't have no time. He had no time to make it. I just saw him and I couldn't believe it. I mean, I didn't even want to go to his funeral. I didn't even want to do that. I mean, I see him alive one day and then the next day you don't see him.

DAVID SEGGARA

The way I was brought up by my parents they brought me up not strict, but with morals and values. We have to teach other people that violence is not the answer because I know a lot of parents out there, they just don't care. Teenagers are the ones who have to prevent gun

violence, not adults. Usually a lot of the homicides in Hartford are caused by teenagers and gang members.

MARY JO ELLIOTT

There's nothing you can really say to change these kid's minds. Because they have got their mind on one thing and that is being out here, holding a tool, having a tool so nobody would want to step to them, or what ever. I don't understand it, I had enough of it. I think it's play and I think it's petty.

BILL SAMBOY

We are the police, we the real cops. We're the ones that are around when they're not around. When they're out there patrolling their area, because there is more of us than there is police. So they can't be everywhere, but we have to take care of our part and our part is taking back the community. We need to take back our streets. A bullet and violence is not prejudiced. It cares for no color rich poor whatever, black, white. Whatever situation your in it does not care. A bullet doesn't have a name on it specifically. If anything it has everybody's name on it.

MARY JO ELLIOTT

So a female holding a gun is no different than a male holding a gun. Regardless of what sex, you still got a gun in your hand, and if your still holding that gun, then your thinking about doing something.

TONY KARDULIS

Kids, they shooting people, pulling triggers without no remorse. They're not even thinking about the consequences so it's like the blink of an eye to pull a trigger.

MARY JO ELLIOTT

It don't be like people go buy a gun to come out here and shoot somebody they get them for protection.

BILL SAMBOY

I didn't feel nothing. It happened so fast that I was just shocked. Then when you settle down you start to think about what could have happened. I don't know how old I was, I must of been like, 15, 16. And I had a friend named Alexi Kilas and we used to go to Buckley, we were freshman and then. Well I went to sit on the porch, his brother-in-law was there too. And he was cleaning his gun. He was waving it, being a silly kid about it, acting like a jerk. When Alexi came out the door he was waving it and it accidentally went off and shot him on the side. I was in the middle between them, so when the bullet went, it almost..it like nicked me. But it didn't hit me, and that was my first encounter with gun violence, actually, with death.

ANTONIO NEGRON

I fought a lot with my fists but it felt different, having a gun, it felt like there was nothing to fear, it was like "What's to fear, I've got this gun. What, what does the guy have that could possibly hurt me more than what I got, that could possibly hurt him," and I think most likely, that's what a lot of other kids feel. They, they hold a gun and they probably feel more powerful. 'Cause there's plenty of kids that I know, that really can't fight. They can't defend themselves, and they

feel the only way to defend themselves is with a gun. And the reason they feel that way is because holding a gun probably makes them feel a lot more powerful. The next thing you know if they hold a gun and they're, they're loud, they run around they, they think they're like God.

DAVID SEGGARA

It's so easy that you could purchase it in your back yard. Nowadays there is called the black market. Than the other person they are about to hurt or they are about to cause damage to. Like one day they are like these kids that are so quiet, they don't start nothing. They sell you a gun for like \$20 , \$30, \$50, to \$100, \$200 anybody could purchase it.

ANTONIO NEGRON

In Hartford, there's a liquor store like in every neighborhood. There's a liquor store, there's like three liquor stores, I mean like in every five blocks there's probably a liquor store in Hartford. In West Hartford a kid has to go out his way to get his hand on liquor. It's just the same way with guns. In West Hartford they just don't bust out and be like "Hey we're sellin' a gun," but in Hartford you can go to your neighborhood and y'know, find somebody who's selling a gun. It's natural. It's always been like that and I don't think It's going to be changed unless the government decides to put a stop to it, which I think it's all in their hands. I think gang violence and all that also depends on the government itself...if they want to stop it.

FRED

My experience with a gun is that it's take or be take. My situation was that somebody want to take from me and I wouldn't allow it. So, he shot me and I shot him. He just got the worser point of the bullet, put it like that. He just got it in the back, I just got it in the leg. I get ten years in jail, he walk free. Nothing to be bragging about really.

MARY JO ELLIOT

I mean you at work and the next thing you turn around there is a gun in your face and some one is telling you to give them your money. And then the next second your on the ground bleeding half to death. I cant imagine what he is going through right now he is probably still suffering because he got shot, his life got took the wrong way. I know that the last thing on his mind is that I am about to die.

FRED

It ain't all about regret...It's all on the standards as if you learn from what you did. If now in the state of mind that I have I know I was wrong. Which is I could of took it a better way. Since I had the mentality were it's either take or be take, so I just took. I didn't use my head, I was young, I was just like every other gang banger out here. I ain't have no mentality, I ain't have no type responsibility, none what so ever. So I took him, just like he tried telling me they was going to kill me and stuff but I don't remember much after that, I blanked out. When I woke up I was inside the park and I was cut up. They tried to carve like their initials in me or something like that and some guy woke me up, he take me. It ain't no thoughts, it's a shocking moment, put it like that. Because when you will least expect it. You look, you glance, you see blood, you figured you shoot. It ain't no experience, it's a shock. You'll be surprised what a bullet really does when it hits you, because it's a real painful experience.

MARY JO ELLIOT

One time I got left up in Keney Park cut up by a Latin Queen and this old guy had found me. I got a phone call, somebody had told me, they said, "Well stay in the house, cause they going to come get you". So I called my people so I was like, "Well come get me, get me away from here, cause they comin' to get me." So now I'm leaving outside and I was walking up the street and got to the corner and a car pulled up. The girl pulled out a gun from the back seat and told me to get in the car so I got in the car and I wasn't going to try to run or anything. When they got me they was kicking me and calling me all kinds of things and whatever and they was like "Wake up, wake up" he said, "You all right?" and I was like, "Well, yeah, I'm OK but, like, where am I? What's going on I mean I totally bugged out and I tried to hit him and everything. I couldn't believe what was going on. So I was walking up the street and I still couldn't breathe with this smell like they put something on me or made me drink something. I don't know. Then my brother had saw me. That's when he called the police and everything. One time I had my baby with me and the same guy had saw me. That is when he called the police and everything. At one time I had my baby with me and the same girls had caught up with me again and brought out a tool and put it to my baby's face and told me that either they going to kill my daughter or they going to kill me. You know and I was like, "Well let my baby go", cause I was with my niece and I said take the baby and leave. She was like, "What about you, I'm not leavin". I'm like, "Just take the baby and go". Golly. So then the girl was like "Oh you would die for your child, huh? I said, "Yes I would. She said, "Well that's what's about to happen." This car had pulled up and these guys were like, "What's going on over there" and everything and I was like, "Get some help, get some help". They was telling me to shut up, they wanted to pop me right now and then a guy had walked up and he was like, "What's going on?". He said, "You got a gun?" He was like, "Yo, call the boys, call they boys". Then the girls jumped in their car and they had left but after that day I never took my child to walk nowhere else with me and that's when I knew I had to get out of the gang. My life could have got took, my child's life could have got took, you know. I still think about all of that stuff. I'm happy I'm still here. If I could ask my brother for his forgiveness, I would, I mean why would I want to go do what people did to you to somebody else, you know, I almost had a chance where I could have did that. I mean I could have shot somebody, whatever, acting like I don't care.

TONY KARDULIS

Okay, we was playing basketball, four courts, gun shots goes off, pow pow pow. Everybody scatter, except one man, one man is down, he was shot and killed. It could of been either one of us. I don't know I just felt bad you know one minute there's your friend and the next minute he is gone.

MARY JO ELLIOT

I had to go through a lot. They was talking about bouncing me, no I mean termination. When they terminate you it's nothing like a bounce, it's like when you get bounced you only get punched or kicked for like five, six minutes. When you get terminated they try to kill you. Try to cut you, shoot you or whatever, however way they can get you out of it without you snitching or whatever, they are going to do it. I knew one of the high ranks, so I went to her and asked her to give me my walking papers, you know, so I can get my life together, and she gave me my walking papers. It wasn't like you get a piece of paper just to walk. It's like I mean you have to

ask permission if you can be free. I mean that's crazy. I am asking this lady if I can have my life back. But at the same time I am praying please let this lady just tell me I can just walk with out sticking these girls on me. I mean because I probably would have been dead if I would have stuck in there a little bit longer. I probably would have ended up in juvenile or dead.

TONY KARDULIS

My first experience with gun violence, I think I was about maybe eleven years old I was taking the city bus across town to get a hair cut on Barber St. Rung the cord to get off the bus in the back of the bus. Then I saw... I witnessed like a drug deal went bad and you hear the drug dealer with the gun sayin' "Stop, stop or I'm gonna' shoot!," the kid who just ripped him off just kept running and then the drug dealer just opened up, shot him like four or five times in his back. Killed him. Right there.

MARY JO ELLIOT

Guns don't make you. I mean, you make yourself. If you feel like you alone then you do it yourself. I mean get your degree. I mean like some people think that I go to school and everything, I get my diploma and I go work, you know what I'm saying, and I ain't going to do nothing and I ain't going to make no money. Man when you get a check that got your name on it saying that you made that money, that's going to make me feel good. I mean these people out there want cream, that's all they want. They want to make it real fast, you know. Money is the root to all evil, believe me. The consequences is deep. Either you be in jail for the rest of your life or you get the death penalty. People don't think about that. I made a lot of mistakes but it's never to late to turn around. It's never to late to put your faith into something else that is good for you. As far as school , I am not saying go to church and be a Christian over one night. If you look at yourself and at what your doing, and you don't like it and you don't approve of your life style than you can change it there is nothing wrong with a little hope. I thank god that I am here. And now she [her child] is going to school and talking to me, she is my best friend, she keeps me going. She sees me crying and she tells me to stop crying because she loves me still. I mean being a mother is hard especially at my age, but I have help from my mother so I'm doing all right.

ANTONIO NEGRON

It was different living in Connecticut because, I was never born here, so moving here nobody knows anything about me. So It's like totally starting a new life. Nobody knows anything about me, nobody knows about my past, nobody knows anything that I've done, nobody knows anything. I don't have to worry about people jumping me from behind for no reason, because I didn't do anything around here. I'm new around the neighborhood.