

JACQUELINE VENTERS

My name is Jacqueline Venters. I'm a resident of Compton. I've been living here for 24 years.

'It took me years to get my head back together.'

At 26 years old, I witnessed the murder of my husband. I seen the fire come out of the gun. I still live with that today. At a young age, I became involved in a domestic violence relationship and that's what cost me the life of my husband. This man just wouldn't go away. He sent someone to my house, and they murdered my husband. My babies were two and four. It took me years to get my head back together. I had a mental breakdown. God saved me; I'm a survivor.

I became a community mom and provider for the kids. Drugs had flooded our communities and moved into Compton. A lot of the young ladies had got on crack and the kids was being neglected and the grandmothers had some of them. I became the community mom, auntie, grandma, whatever. I gathered the kids in the midst of getting my head back together. I think that was the point of my survival – helping others. I experienced a lot being there with other people I knew that lost their lives.

'Nobody should experience nothing like this.'

April 4, 2011, this one was close to home. I call him my son, my two grandchildren's dad. He was accused of burglary. In the midst of him running from the police, they shot him five times in the back unarmed. He hid from them for four hours. During the whole thing, we were communicating with him on the phone. We were talking to him when he hid. He started making phone calls saying, "I'm scared. They're shooting at me." When my daughter got to the scene, she said, "They say you had a gun." He said, "I don't have no gun. I don't even want to be carrying a gun." He said, "They shot me with something. I don't even know what they shot me with." He didn't even know that he was shot five times. He had a collapsed lung and a ruptured kidney.

He decided to come out [of hiding] because he probably would have died if he hadn't come out. When he did, they start shooting at him again while he was on the ground. Nobody should experience nothing like this. He laid on the ground and they let the dog over the fence and allowed the dog to maul him and drag him for a block. When they got to him, they kicked him in his head. I can't imagine what was going through his head at that time because that's fearful. God saved him to tell his story. He's here right now.

Since 2013, I started fighting for him because he was forced to take the deal under duress because of the abuse that he received in prison. They beat him inside the jail. They allowed the inmates to beat him. They denied him his medication. He had so many things against him.

His second court appearance, we had a public defender. She said he was excluded from the weapon [charge]. I said, “I told you he didn't have a weapon. No fingerprints, no DNA, nothing tracing my son to this weapon because he didn't have one.” So, he was excluded – now this is documented – and went to the bus to go back to jail. [My son told me], when he was walking into the jail, a deputy said, “What’s your name?” Then, they said, “Oh, you go in there.” He said he stopped walking like, *why they told me to go in there?* He went in with his head down and when he raised his head up, they had four inmates in there beating his a--. Again, he had a collapsed lung, ruptured kidney, his hand is messed up; he can't hardly use his right hand because he got shot at it. All this stuff was so traumatic for me because he's telling me and there is nothing that I could do to help him. Three times I had one of the guys from the nonprofit organization that fights for justice go down to the jail and talk to the watch commander. I wanted them to know that my son had somebody that was inquiring about him.

‘I want justice for my son.’

They moved his case from LA to Norwalk. He took a plea deal. He told them, “I'm not taking that gun [charge], but I'll take the deal.” To be honest, I advised him to take the deal because they told him in the jail, “You're not going to make it out of here.” Sometimes I regretted that I did that. But then I said, *Lord, they would have killed him in there.*

[He got] 29 years for burglary with no proof, and proof that he did not have a gun. They gave him a 10-year gun enhancement knowing that he didn't have a weapon. He told the public defender, “I'll take the deal but I'm not taking that gun.” So, this is our understanding. But for two years, she denied him his paperwork. I fought for 10 years to get his paperwork, a big box with over 4,000 pages. That's a violation of his civil rights. But his public defender did that.

You have to follow the law too as law enforcement. They didn't do anything. They allowed this to happen. They have not been held accountable.

Through this journey, I see how [law enforcement] protects themselves. All these that didn't do their jobs, in my mind, you are accountable for my son's life. You destroyed his family. He hasn't had [a relationship] with his kids. [J] was a baby [when my son was incarcerated] and he just turned 13. I think what they did was wrong. I want justice for my son.

'It's like our lives don't matter.'

My trust and faith in God keeps me going. I'm a firm believer. Something inside of me told me, *He gave this to you. You not gonna stop until you get it done.* Sometimes, when I feel I can't do anything, I ask God, "Give me strength. Get me back up. I got to keep going. Get me back up." I try to figure out, *where do I go now?* We've been in it for 13 years.

It's like our lives don't matter. I couldn't get anybody to help. I have letters that I sent to every agency for years crying out for help. None of them responded. I went through every agency that you could think of, and I'm going to tell you what got the ball rolling after all – Assemblyman Mike Gibson. He wrote a letter and that's what pushed the ball. It's sad and it's hurtful because I know I'm not the only one. I go to those [Sheriff Civilian] Oversight Commission meetings. And every time I go, I've seen these families get up there and question the actions of law enforcement and why they're not dealing with these unjust cases. I meet a lot of people over there, and it's like, *we come here once a month to address what we're dealing with, but where do we get the help?* Talking is one thing, but action is another. We want you guys to hold these people accountable for their actions. What makes you think that they're above the law?

We want [law enforcement] not to be able to investigate themselves. They need to have an outside agency do the investigations. They should never allow them to investigate themselves and that's what they've been doing. What I wish is that we have some type of Community/Resident Oversight Commission where we could bring our issues. We should be able to get some help for them. Because they don't do anything. I was getting denied from the people that's supposed to help. But just imagine if we had a commission that said, "No, y'all got to listen to them." Somebody that's able to push the line.

'I wouldn't wish this on nobody.'

Soon as my son took the deal, [my attorney] couldn't help him. What I was advised to do is make as much noise as you can to bring attention. I'm thinking I should have made more noise. Maybe get the media involved. I would encourage [anyone going through this] to not give up. Keep your trust and faith in God, not man, because he lifted me up many times when this laid me down. I wouldn't wish this on nobody. It's hurtful, knowing that you didn't do it and they have taken your life away. We've seen people that's coming out of prison doing 25-30 years for a crime that they didn't commit. *What can we do to keep this from not happening?*

I know that I'm a fighter. If it's something I believe in, I'll keep going and not everybody has that. With law enforcement, that's what they expect; they want you to stop. They wear you down to go away. I

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will encourage you to keep fighting and try to find people that have the same struggle or support groups. I get so many calls right now today from prison, the community, and other people looking for my help because of the stories that we share about the journey. Keep fighting.

