

MANUEL AND CONCHA SANCHEZ

I'm Manuel Sanchez.

I'm Concha Sanchez.

I live in San Fernando Valley, and I've lived there for seven years.

I was born and raised in the San Fernando Valley.

'Never did we imagine that she would pay the consequence with her life.'

I lost my only biological daughter August 16, 2022, at 2:00 p.m. She was attending a funeral service for her friend; his mother had passed away. It was a shooting that happened on Lagoon Avenue in the City of Wilmington. There were three females shot; she's the only one that lost her life. She was 19 years old. She was there to pay respects to [her friend's] mother she'd known since grade school. They don't know how many vehicles or how many potential suspects, but they counted 89 bullet casings. They were targeted.

The shooting was for her boyfriend. But the boyfriend got nothing. My daughter got the bullets. An aunt got a bullet in the arm and another bystander in the foot. Had we known that was a hotspot and three days prior there was a shooting at the house, we would have never allowed her to go. That house had no business having a reception there.

The shooting was meant for the boyfriend. When they showed up, all he did was run away. He didn't even turn to grab my daughter and take her with him. He just ran. I've heard backstory. I've heard hearsay that it was a retaliation.

There's so many things happening in the city. I've seen it. I'm from down there. I don't have to be down there to know what goes on. I've always told him, "You're going to put my daughter in a situation where she's going to get hurt. She gets hurt or something happens to her, don't ever show your face around me again. I don't want to hear 'I'm sorry.' I don't want to hear because I am telling you now this is what's going to happen." Never did I ever think my daughter was going to lose her life. She's my only biological daughter.

I have other children, but biologically, she's the only one. Our daughter's name is Justice. Every time they would walk out of the house or every time we would pick them up from that area, we would explain, "Justice, you're an adult now. If something happens, you will not be released to me. Whatever these children

are doing, you're the one who's legally an adult and you'll have to pay the consequences.” Never did we imagine that she would pay the consequence with her life. Unfortunately, she did.

‘We didn't even get to go in and say goodbye.’

We were at work when we got the call. At the time, we were under the impression she got shot in her arm. When we got to the hospital, they said that she wasn't there. Reality is that she got shot and it went through her chest.

[Her boyfriend's] sister called to tell me Justice had been shot. She was shot in the arm, and she'll be okay. I need you to get down here. I'm like, “What hospital are you taking her to?” “The ambulance is still here. They're not telling us where they're taking her.”

They called us in the room, “The doctors are ready to talk to you now.”

When we went in the room, we were surrounded by police. We were surrounded by police the whole time, from the minute we got there. The doctor came in and said, “I'm sorry.” I screamed. Then he started talking and we hit the floor.

We saw the gurney running from one side of the hospital to the other. We didn't know that was her. The doctor said, “We tried everything we could. We had to break open her breastplate to massage her heart. It pumped. It came back. We had to massage it four times. It kept coming back, she kept coming back. But unfortunately, the last time before we got her to the OR (operating room), it wouldn't come back.” I believe if first responders would have got her to the hospital sooner than they did, there may have been a chance. It took first responders 35 to 45 minutes to get her to the hospital. You're telling me you had to massage her heart four times within 45 minutes, but from where she got shot to the hospital is 15 minutes? *Where's the other 30 minutes? If you were to get her there within those last 30 minutes, she may have had a better chance of surviving.*

The police officer said that they worked on her for a minute out in the area [of the shooting]. The police officer that rode with her in the ambulance held her hand the whole time. She was never alone, but he never gave us specific times or anything like that.

Worst part out of all of it is her body was evidence. We didn't even get to go in and say goodbye. Not even a kiss. We had a look at her through a glass f-----g door.

With tubes still in her mouth. That blue they cover you with before surgery. We didn't get to see her for two weeks. Once they released her body from the mortuary, we were blessed to see her through friends. They were very compassionate and understanding and did the footwork for us.

My house was full. From the time they pronounced her passing, the house was full for the next three weeks with friends, family.

We come from that lifestyle, and nobody wanted us to make the wrong decisions of retaliation or hurting that boy. He tried to be brave and talk s--t at the hospital.

When I seen him at the hospital, his mom and his sister and his little friends showed up there.

They were trying to fight their way in, and I was like, "You're not going to see my daughter. You're not going to see her." And all I could say is, "I f---ing told you. The best thing for you to do right now is go and stay with your mother. I will give you updates. But this is your fault. How many f---ing times have I told you that my daughter will pay the consequences for your actions." I didn't do anything.

At that time, we didn't know anything yet. When we come back [after getting the news], I leave my husband with his sister and one of our good friends. I let [the boyfriend] know. "You need to go. We lost Justice. For your safety, I need you to leave." He started talking to my husband and my husband went for him. He hid behind his mom.

Why do I feel punished?

I have a past of that life. I mean, that was my upbringing. I tried to break the cycle. In 2015, I decided I wanted to change my life. I went into a drug treatment facility to try for real. I left my daughter with her mom; the city that they lived in, that's where my daughter met all her friends. The gang culture is heavy in that city. Justice was not involved in gangs, but she gravitated to the boys that were. For four years, she was living with her biological mom by herself. Her mom would work nights. My daughter had nobody to be with, so that's where she gravitated to.

When she did come back into my life in 2019, at the age of 15, I explain this to her like, “That's not who I am anymore. I've changed my life around. I want you to have stability.” And that's what she wanted.

When she called for us to pick her up [to live with us], her words were, “I'm tired and I want stability. I want a chance at life.”

“I want to leave this behind,” [her boyfriend said.] He was 17 years old. He had grown up without a dad. He had a single mom from Mexico. His brothers were deeply involved in gang violence, in gang activity, and he was the middle boy. He wanted to be tough; I seen myself in him. At that age, when he asked for help and my daughter asked for help for him to change his life, I seen a chance to give him a better life.

Unfortunately, it didn't work out for him. Unfortunately, he gravitated more toward that life and today he's doing 14 years in prison. He was caught for other crimes after she passed. I've been to prison. I know what prison is like. I know the type of guy he is. I pray that he does make it home. I pray that he doesn't get killed in prison.

It's not about him. It's about the mom not suffering like we did. Like we are.

It's the person I am today. I wouldn't want his mom to feel the pain that we're feeling.

We met with the police officer that rode with Justice in the ambulance about a month later. He was so real, so heartfelt and honest. He had to take a leave of absence say five years prior when he had lost his father to a hit and run. He said all he can wonder was, *what was my dad's last thoughts? Who was there with him?* He wanted us to have some comfort and let us know that she wasn't alone.

He's a patrol officer. He's not a homicide detective. As of now, I haven't had any response from the detectives. I haven't been able to get any updates. Give me something.

At first, he was texting them all the time. It's frustrating. The area [where it happened], the Wilmington area, you see a shooting in that area every day. Since the situation, all they tell you is, “There was a shooting in this place.” They know who did it. There is a picture. There's a video. There's a photo of the person who did it. That information has been forwarded to the detectives.

The picture came from the sister. The boyfriend's sister was there. They have a photo of him running. They won't make an arrest. They said there's not enough concrete evidence. They need a verbal confirmation from people that that is the person.

The sister won't say. She won't speak.

His mom said, "Your daughter was like my daughter." The mom knows who did it. That family knows who did it. Here we are just short of two years, and you still will not say who did it. So don't tell me you love my daughter like your daughter.

This is only my opinion. This is not confirmed. But in my opinion, it's bias because they know who I am. I haven't been in that type of lifestyle for over 20 years since Justice was born. I was an addict. So, I was still around those people. But I haven't been an active gang member in over 20 years. They're using my prior gang activity as a bias. Like, *her dad was involved, so what if it was to get back for her?* I'm coming up on nine years clean. Why do I feel punished for something that has nothing to do with me?

I don't know when my life is going to shatter again.'

This little girl, from where she was when I left her with her mom to where she was before her passing, was a remarkable turnaround. When she came with me in 2015, I got her into therapy because mine and her mom's relationship was so toxic. She went back to school. She had a job. She had little bumps in the road, but she still had turned her life around. Her grades went from all Fs to As and Bs within a year and a half. Her goal was to graduate from high school to show that she was smarter than everybody thought she was. Another three weeks in school and she would have her high school diploma. They gave her an honorary graduation after she passed.

She had dreams and goals and aspirations. She went from a troubled teen solving problems with her hands to using words and solving conflict by de-escalating situations. That's all I wanted her to do, and she did that. She changed her behavior. She changed her attitude. She finally knew what it was like to...

Be loved.

Be loved and have stability.

I myself didn't get to do the grieving. I was the support. I was the mom. I was the wife.
He stayed home from work.

I didn't work for four months. I stayed in bed. To this day, when I'm home by myself, I wait for her to walk in that door. Nobody's home and I feel it the most when the house is empty. I tried to hold it together.

I don't know how well I'm doing. I try to mask it well. I feel the toll being taken on me. I don't know when my breaking point is going to be. I don't know when my life is going to shatter again. But I feel it.

Nobody can tell you what it feels like to lose a child.'

This season will be my third time going to Sacramento, to the State Capitol to try to get assembly members and senators and legislative to pass certain bills. There's one that's called AB-2499, which is employment protection for families of violence, victims of violence for them to have more time off from work without being penalized or without having a fear of losing their jobs. They're trying to get it extended to 12 weeks for paid time off. Right now, they give us five days. That's it. That doesn't give you enough time to speak to law enforcement, [go to] court hearings. God forbid you have to do funeral services. Five days – three days paid and two days unpaid. That's not enough time. We're fighting for that to be extended for 12 weeks. Let's not have another family, whoever it may be, suffer and be in fear of losing their job.

I lost my job over this. I didn't shower for days. I got up. I sat in my living room with the TV on not knowing what was playing. This whole time she is trying to hold it together. She's trying to make ends meet. With AB-2499, it would give other victims of violent crimes a way to not worry about, *okay, eight months later, I'm hit with this big ol' wall of grief. I have no time off.* You got 12 weeks to take that whenever you want. Whether it be a year from now, three years from now, you have that in your bucket.

Getting a support group to walk you through this or to stay with you is the most important thing. Do not try and do this on your own. Seek outside support, whether it be with a grief group, a crime survivors' group, a victim's group, some type of group. We tried a couple of grieving groups before we found Parents of Murdered Children. Other groups didn't work for us. When we showed up, they were about parents who lost children to cancer or family members to cancer. Now mind you, we're very familiar to losing family members and people we know to cancer. But nobody can tell you what it feels like to lose a child. And again, with the situation. Yes, we lose children for medical conditions. But a victim, an innocent bystander, an innocent child killed by gun violence? Once we get this AB-2499 passed [I want to] start working on something against gun violence.

The Storytelling Project – Manuel and Concha Sanchez

Recorded at:
Los Angeles County, CA
06/28/24
2:00 pm

My goal is to start a foundation in her name. My goal is to get her name out there as much as possible. To seek justice as much as possible for her under her name. I mean, that's her name. Justice for Justice.

