**Intro:**

**Kit:** On October 24, 2022, my life and the lives of my classmates were changed forever. An intruder entered Central Visual and Performing Arts. A school that shares a building with ours. The intruder, a former CVPA student, was armed with an AR-15 and more than 600 rounds. We hid and then fled with memories of a day that would haunt us for the rest of our lives.

When I’m trying to understand something, I look for facts. I read articles and studies searching for answers. But the thing facts are missing is human touch. So often school shooting survivors are reduced to headlines and statistics but we’re so much more. Today I’m interviewing Sara: a classmate, friend, and fellow survivor to hear a different side of the story.

**Interview:**

**Kit:** “Hey Sara. So today I'm going to be asking you a few questions about your experience during the school shooting on October 24th. Can you please start by going through the events of the day as you remember them.”

**Sara:** “Well I remember the morning starting out normal. I woke up I got ready for school and I came to school and it was pretty normal and then we got to math class and I was like ‘Man this is a really boring lesson’ and I was like ‘I can't wait for my second period because it's a free period’ and then after that we had gotten a text message from STLCC that said there was an active shooter on their campus and so we were all freaking out because Gracie and Colin went there and we're like ‘well they're our friends’ so we were texting them and we were like ‘Are you guys OK? Like is something happening? Like what's going on?’ and then after that I remember someone going on the announcements. I think it was Turner and said like ‘the students are not allowed in the hallways’. Like ‘lock your doors’. Like we're going on a soft lockdown and Mr. Hommowun is like ‘OK someone go lock the door’ and no one went to lock the door and he was like and he repeated like ‘go lock the door’ and someone finally got up and locked the door and then we continued on with math class a little hesitantly. And then after that we heard someone, or I heard some, shouting in the office because Mr. Hommowun's room was right next to the office so we could kind of like hear what was going on in there and so we basically heard them shouting. I was like ‘Oh my God what's going on like there's obviously something going on in there’ and then we heard Ms. (now Dr.) Cater come on the announcement and she was like, she didn't say the intruder code correctly, but we like we heard, what is it, ‘Mr. Wyman’ or something and we were like OK here we go guys. Like this is not a drill. um and I remember like looking at Mr. Hommowun and like so confused like what are we supposed to do, because we had never done an intruder drill in his room, and so we all sat in the corner and I accidentally shoved Kit under a table. I remember sitting in front of Silas and we were all on our phones like texting our parents and the Django texted this song to the group chat and I started laughing quietly.”

**Kit:** “And which song was that Sara?”

**Sara:** “’This is America’ and then after that we sat there for a really long time and then someone, I wanna say someone, came and like tried to open the door. But I can't remember exactly and then we heard knocking on the door and Mr. Hommowun went over but he didn't like open the door because he wanted to wait till he heard like multiple voices because he wanted to make sure it wasn't the shooting [shooter] pretending to be the police and so he waited until there were multiple people and then he opened the door and the police officers came in and they're like ‘Move, move, move! Let's go! We gotta go!’ like keep like ‘Get out of the building!’”

**Kit:** “At what point did the fire alarm go off?”

**Sara:** Oh! I forgot about that. We were sitting. That part got so annoying. We were sitting in the corner and you know we have been staying there for like 5 minutes and all of a sudden we hear the fire alarm go off and we looked at Mr. Hommowun and we're like ‘What are we supposed to do?’ like ‘Do we leave? Do we stay?’ and he was like, he like, like, he like, placated us. He was like ‘Stay there.’ like ‘We're just going to stay. We're just gonna sit here.’ and then the fire alarm went off for like 5 minutes and it turned off and then went off again and I was like ‘OK this is so dumb.’ but so that had happened. And then we sat there for some more and then the police came in and then they were like ‘Get out!’ and they had like giant guns and it was very scary and I remember dragging Kit out from under the table and pulling her along with me as we ran out of building. Then we went to the Courtesy Diner parking lot where we were trying to like find everyone it was very stressful and my dad had called and like ‘What's going on?’ and I like couldn't even like speak to him because I was like hyperventilating so much and then we started our walk to the Schnucks parking lot after all the students had gotten out and we had to regroup there and we found Mr. Hommowun. Then you told the joke. I don't remember what the joke was. He was like ‘I’ll remember this and laugh later.’ and then my dad came and picked me up and went ‘Are you OK?’ that's like I guess, I mean I don't know and then after a while I was just laying in my room because I just didn't want to do anything and he said like ‘It's like OK . I have to go to work. Do you wanna take the car and go hang out with people?’ I was like ‘No, I'm OK. I just want to be alone for a while.’ and then I was alone for a few hours since everyone was out doing stuff. My mom, she was at a work like convention thing. I had texted her that there was an intruder in the building and she was like ‘Can't they just shuffle them out?’ because like at Ameren she thought the shooter was just like some guy who just wandered in and not some guy with a shooter like a gun and I was like ‘No mom. They can't just shuffle them out. She came back and she was like ‘Are you OK?’ and then she gave me a build-a-bear that she got from the convention, and it has a little Ameren t-shirt on it. I call it my trauma bear.”

**Kit:** “That's so sweet! So clearly this is a pretty big event. How has this changed your life?”

**Sara:** “Well I've noticed when I hear a loud noise I very much have a like vulgar reaction to it. Like I curse and then I jump and I'm like ‘Oh my God!’ and it's, it's definitely gotten worse and I don't know if that's trauma manifesting itself or just like me being me. People definitely tiptoe around me now. Like a lot of my friends outside of school do and a lot of my coworkers. So I mean I try and keep it, like, I try not to talk about it and if it does come up I normally try and keep it as lighthearted as it can be. I don't love talking about it but I mean when like there was this one time at work when a customer was like ‘Where do you got to school?’ and I was like “Oh, I go to Collegiate.’ and they're like ‘Oh. The school that had a shooting?’ I was like ‘Yeah’ and he was like “What was that experience like for you?’ I was like ‘Well, that's not a nice experience. I don't wanna live through that again.’ like I mean like it's an event I recognize that happened.

**Kit:** “You talked a bit about how this has changed your relationship with friends that weren't there. How has this changed your relationship with the people who also lived through it?”

**Sara:** “It kind of has negatively and positively impacted my relationships. There are some people that I used to talk to that like I don't anymore, but also I think as a community it brought us a lot closer. I think when we first came back, tensions were very high, so yeah I've definitely made some rifts in some friendships that I've had because of that and so and I think that. It's difficult to keep friendships as strong as they were before the shooting because of the trauma that we're experiencing and because we don't exactly know how other people are going through it. It can be difficult to try and keep or maintain a relationship that you don't understand what they're going through or how they're reflecting on it and so I think that it also it's kind of isolated me as well in the school sense because like people they understand the experience but they don't like, everyone processes trauma differently so it's very difficult for them to understand like how I'm processing it and how they're processing it is different.”

**Kit: “**So, this clearly is a big moment and those big moments kind of shape our viewpoints on things. How do you think this has changed your outlook on life, and then also, how do you think this has changed your outlook from, like, a political standpoint and looking at, like, gun laws and regulations?”

**Sara:** “So on my life outlook I'm a pessimist. I think I think we've all come to terms with that and so I think that in that moment I had made peace with myself. I was like ‘I lived a pretty good life’ like it's all right and I think now, like looking back on that moment, I don't think I would have been happy if I had died. I definitely would have haunted some people. I think it, yeah, I took life for granted before the shooting. Yeah and I'm trying not to do that now because I don't know when my last moment is gonna be. You know? That's a very sobering thought that you know someone else has the power to take your life from you and I think that's something that many people shouldn't have the power to do. Yeah I think that while I still do make some very, I don't want to say inappropriate, but they are inappropriate, jokes about my life I think that I would like to have that power in my life, like have power to take it if I want to, and I think that I currently will not be doing that even though I do make jokes about it. I think it's kind of my way of trying to keep that control. Someone else shouldn't be allowed to take my life.”

**Kit:** “So it's not so much that you want to take your life. It's that you don't want someone else to have that power, and if anyone has it, you want it to be in your hands rather than someone elses. Correct?”

**Sara:** “Yes.”

**Kit:** “And like politically, like, has this strengthened your resolve to act for change based on how you vote, or what you stand for, or anything like that?

**Sara:** “Well. OK ,so this may be a topic, but before the shooting I was I was already against guns. I like, I wanna gun control. Like this, this is stupid that they like because we can obviously tell it's negatively affecting everyone's lives. Yeah but I never really like went out of my way to act, like be an activist for it before the shooting, more so now I'm just angry that nothing has happened and I don't think activism is doing enough and so currently I'm trying to like I'm sending letters to government people I'm like I'm actually like doing stuff now and rather just saying that I'm not like I'm not for guns. Like I'm like actually like some of my family members who live in Texas are like all like pro-gun and I like had like a massive argument with them because like there's like they’re negatively impacting my life. I think that the shooting has definitely made me realize that like just saying that you're not for guns is not enough you actually have to go out and do stuff about it because like nothing's gonna happen because I mean we've seen protests we've seen activists say stuff and we've seen like focus groups do stuff but like nothing has changed and so we actually need to go to the government and see if this is. You're like because in the constitution it says like ‘for the people’ and obviously these guns are not for the people because they're killing everyone. So yeah I think having to do stuff is actually happening.

**Kit:** “Yeah. So this will very much be an issue that you consider when you're considering like candidates when you're voting?”

**Sara:** “Oh yeah.”

**Kit:** “This is like a trend that we've been seeing in Gen. Z as a whole. After we've all lived through this are you hopeful that while these experiences are horrendous and terrible and should not be happening are you hopeful that they will inspire change on a broad scale or at least inspire change and get the people who are living through these things to get things changed in the future?”

**Sara:** “Yes. Many people say that generation Z is the generation of change because we grew up with the Internet, we grew up with cell phones, we grew up with school shootings, and so generations over us, like my mom's generation, she thought an intruder you could just shuffle them out and they didn't have a gun and like the boomers they didn't have to go through school shootings and so I think when Gen. Z, and a lot of them are almost old enough, but I think when Generation Z gets into the political sphere we are definitely gonna, like I mean like we've had to grow up with this and so it's generation alpha and so we're both very done. Like, we're just like, “This is stupid. This is obviously not working. We obviously need to do something and you guys are not doing it.” and so when we are able to get into office that changes very obviously going to happen quickly.”

**Kit:** “Yeah. OK. Well, that is all. So thank you so much for this interview today. And yeah.”

**Outro:**

**Kit:** Unfortunately, our school shooting wasn’t the first and it won't be the last. It was the 30th of 51 school shootings to take place in 2022 alone, the most on record. Over the course of the year, 40 students and teachers were killed while more than 100 were injured. While these horrendous events continue to occur at record rates, the resolve of the impacted students is also growing as we fight for the right to learn safely. While we’ve been through a lot, it’s important to remember that we are more than our past. At the end of the day, we’re just kids, trying to live through high school.