Episode 201-- A Survivor on Why it Takes a Village (and Forg...

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

survivors, shot, gun violence, people, philadelphia, mcclain, hospital, victim, felt, brady, documentary, foundation, person, listen, coma, podcast, ladder, shooter, died, life

SPEAKERS

Oronde McClain, JJ Janflone, Kelly Sampson



JJ Janflone 00:09

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JJ Janflone 00:22

Hey, everybody. Welcome back to another episode of Red, Blue and Brady. I'm one of your hosts, JJ.

Kelly Sampson 00:43

And I'm your other host, Kelly.



JJ Janflone 00:44

And today we are joined by a fantastic guest, Oronde McClain, who is really working so hard to transform his native Philadelphia.

Kelly Sampson 00:53

Oronde is truly an incredible human. I know at certain points during the show, JJ and I were messaging each other like we're talking to a saint right now. And we think that after you listen to this episode, you'll come away with the same impression.

JJ Janflone 01:08

So often on this podcast, we've talked to folks who have experienced gun violence, particularly at a young age, but what I think really stands out about Mr. McClain's story and his efforts is that it really highlights all of the work that survivors have to do, not just to get physically, but also mentally healthy, and then the work that they continue to do in their communities to try to prevent other people from being harmed.

Oronde McClain 01:35

Hi, how are you doing? My name is Oronde McClain, I'm a survivor of gun violence. I am the CEO and founder of the McClain Foundation. I am from Philadelphia.

JJ Janflone 01:46

And I have to say, there's there's a chance you and I might have to fight! As a Pittsburghian, talking to people from Philly is a weird experience for me. I just got to air that first. Kelly's from Detroit. So I don't know who you support in this battle, Kelly.

Kelly Sampson 02:02
Right. No dog in this fight.

JJ Janflone 02:07

Just supervising, to kind of hop in. As you mentioned, we're going to talk a lot about your foundation and some of the work that you do. But you're a survivor advocate. And while I hate to start from that, I wonder if you can share what made you a survivor. You know what, what happened when you were 10?

Oronde McClain 02:26

Oh, sure. So April 3, 2000, I was 10 years old. I was walking to the Chinese store with my mother. She left me there to go check on my sisters. Maybe two, three minutes later, I got a phone call from Mama saying hey, go outside, check on the bus. When I went outside, it wasn't no bus coming. So I turned around immediately to go back to the store. I heard gunshots. I tried to run back to the store and the store owner shut the door on me. And I got shot in the back of your head, too. It was two cops that was off-duty, they was right next door and the 711. They didn't call for backup. They didn't call for help. They didn't call the ambulance. They took me straight to Albert Einstein. When I got there, I was pronounced dead. I died for two minutes and 17 seconds.



So these cops who are like off duty just kind of like scooped you up and just like took you?

Oronde McClain 03:26

Yes. The bullet entered in the back of my head and the type of gun it was, the bullet exploded in my head and now is 32 fragments that sat in my head. They couldn't get any of the fragments there. So I was there. While I was in the hospital, they took half of my brain out while they was trying to save me as well. So imagine you have a 10-yearold boy and these two surgeries getting performed. They hellicoptered my body to the nearest children's hospital, wellthis is Philadelphia, so it was CHOP. They gave half of my skull to my grandmother and she rode in the an ambulance and took that to CHOP as well. When we got to CHOP, they worked on my brain and my skull. They restructured it. They were trying to save it but they couldn't. So, I endured surgery, I slipped into a coma for about seven weeks. While I was there, they just was working with a gel plate. It was I don't know what it was called. But it's like a gel plate and it's on my left side of my brain. I was in a coma for seven weeks. I woke up, when I woke up, I didn't know nothing. Nobody, not even my mother, my father, my sisters. I couldn't walk, talk. I couldn't do any of that. It took me about maybe two, three years because I was in a wheelchair, until I knew how to walk again. Someone had to feed me, I had to do basically everything over. I started as a brand new baby.

JJ Janflone 05:14

Well, first of all, thank you so much for sharing that. But I, you know, the first thing that comes to mind is, what was it like for your family while this is going on? I mean, you mentioned that your grandmother has to travel with a part of your skull to the hospital, which is, I can't imagine. But like what happens when your mom goes to find you?

Oronde McClain 05:37

Yeah. So my mom went that went back to the Chinese store, because I was supposed to meet her girlfriend, and when her girlfriend came, she was like, well, hold on, he's not, he's not there. But somebody just got shot. My mom ran into the Chinese store, she saw my sneaker. And she said, that's my son's sneakers. But when she went to the hospital, they already said, hey, sorry for your loss, he died. And they gave her like my chain, I had a gold cross chain, my other sneaker, and they say sorry he didn't die. They didn't notify her like they resubstituted me and I slipped into a coma. She didn't know that for like 15 minutes. The other rest of my family got to the hospital, maybe like in the next half an hour.

Kelly Sampson 06:28

Your poor family for getting that. I mean, it's bad enough to learn your child's been shot, but then to be told that you didn't make it when you did.

II lanflone 06:37



But so then, so to kind of take us to, you come out of a coma, you've you've been dead for over two minutes before that as part of it, you've had these massive surgeries, what then is recovery even like?

Oronde McClain 06:51

Well, so to go back, so I could take you back to that coma stage. The coma stage I had like an out-of-body experience. I felt like I was a superhero. I was climbing this ladder. That temperature was right. I breathe on my forehead. Everything was perfect. And I was climbing this ladder and I saw this type of light. And I had to get to, so it felt like 35 seconds. I'm climbing this ladder, climbing this ladder, climbing this ladder, and then somebody was yanking my foot. But it felt so good to get up to this light. So I was pushing there, I was like kickin their hand. But then, when they finally pulled me, that's when I woke about the coma. So they told me I was in a coma for about like, seven weeks. But I thought I was only climbing this ladder for like 35 seconds. So this is like, imagine ,my 35 seconds today, is several weeks. So I thought, I thought I was just, you know, climbing this ladder, but my family was like, all sad and disbelief. And they was going through that for seven weeks.

Kelly Sampson 08:11

So yeah, I know, you mentioned that once you did wake up, it wasn't like you woke up and then you just got to go home, you had to learn how to walk, you know, to learn how to communicate.

Oronde McClain 08:20

Yeah, so so that, that I think that that process was like the worst process I ever, that would in my life, because you had to do everything over. So, I used to be right handed, but, half of my body, on my right side is partially paralyzed. So it's not like, totally paralyzed. But if you tapped me on my right side, it takes a minute for me to fill it. It's like a 10 second delay, but I can't write with my right hand anymore. So they taught me how to write with my left hand. The rehabilitation was tough, because they pushed you to relearn everything over that you thought that you knew already. So learn how to walk, or how to speak, just holding a glass of water, just to feed yourself. And that process took maybe, maybe like 15 years, and to this day, I'm still like learning stuff that I should already know as a 32 year-oldmale.

JJ Janflone 09:27

We've had other survivors on particularly who have had brain injuries talking about like the frustration and like the anger of you're smart kid and now someone's holding up like a flashcard that says cat and like you know it's a cat but you can't make yourself say it and then like so you want to burn the hospital down, which is like I think a very valid reaction.

Oronde McClain 09:46

That's, that's a perfect example. It's like let's say 1.2.3.4.5 and I'm like. I know this answer. I'm

screaming 1,2,3,4,5 In my head. But like, I know the answer, and then yelling at the doctors and all that and the therapist because they know you know the answer, but they just want you to say it. And like, you know, I can't say it, but you know I knew the answer. So that was the difficult part. And I try to tell people, because I tried to commit suicide, maybe like over 20.

to say it. And like, you know, I can't say it, but you know I knew the answer. So that was the difficult part. And I try to tell people, because, I tried to commit suicide, maybe like over 20 times, because that was the frustration part and when I was climbing the ladder, that was my peace. So I try to tell people, I want to try to commit suicide, because I wanted to, I just want to get back to that peace that I was. The 1--year-old boy that knew everything who was like a smart kid, not going through this rough patch in my life.

Kelly Sampson 10:43

What you're doing by being open about that, first of all, I mean, I'm sorry that you have had such a battle after this. And for you to be so open about it, I think really helps people to know they're not alone. And to know that, you know, there's, there's someone out there who's sort of setting an example for them. And you actually run a foundation that's in your name, as part of this work, and can you tell us a little bit about your foundation.

Oronde McClain 11:13

So, I've always wanted to help others, like, I felt like my story can, is not about me, it's about other victims, and other survivors that can't do what, what I do. They can't like, be open, and they can't just talk to people. And I said, like, I have to live through my trauma and living through my trauma can help a lot of people. So we called it the McClain Foundation, or my last name, and me and my wife, we opened it up maybe about like two, three years ago. And we help siblings out who have lost loved ones, we give back to the community, and we also just have an open forum for survivors, because I totally get it. I couldn't talk to a therapist, I couldn't talk to that because they don't understand what we go through. But talking to another survivor that was a gunshot victim, and they had to go through therapy, and they understand the frustration that I went through, is like a click that we can relate to, and it's easier to talk. So that's what we basically do. I have a lot of survivors that I talked to, and it just we become best friends after we tell the story. And they get shot in the leg and they get they're like, oh you went through worse. And I'm like no, you went through worse. Every survivor's story is totally different, but it's the same.

Kelly Sampson 12:48

We've heard from people before how helpful it is to have other survivors who can speak and relate to your point, and one of the things that you talk about in your foundation it's actually on your website is you say, although I made it and have a great story, my city does not always have great stories. So could you talk a little bit about Philadelphia and gun violence there and what you're seeing?

Oronde McClain 13:12

Oh, wow. So the media, I can say maybe, how long is Facebook? Maybe with the last five or 10 years and that may that that plays a major part in the violence today. So my city went up to

like 365 murders and that's insane when it comes to somebody that got shot in the head 22 years ago, because 22 years ago, you'd only hear about kids getting shot, and it was truly an accident. But now, we fought we push back to 2022, everybody's getting shot. Everybody's dying. The violence is like ridiculous. It's at an all time high. And coming from a survivor's standpoint, that flares up PTSD, because you don't want to come outside. You don't know what to do. Because you wouldn't, you was in this small space, in a small bubble of your 2,3 friends who got shot maybe 20 years ago. Now everybody's getting shot. Everybody's dying. And it's like it gives you it gives you more power to say, listen, I need to stop this because I'm getting triggered and I don't want nobody to go through what I went through 22 years ago. Like I saw it firsthand. I went through it. So I don't want that to happen to you. So I go on this journey and I go to schools and I go to communities and tell them like, listen, you could put the guns down because listen, as soon as you pull that trigger, it's not a survivor, it's not a victim that you're hurting, it is 20 people, one person getting shot is 20 people that's being affected, you got the shooter's side, and you have the perpetrator's side and you've got the victim's side. And that's like 20, 25 people. So, so you have over what 2100 people getting shot, become survivors a year, you timet that by 20, that's almost like what, 10,000 people becoming a survivors, becoming co-victims, becoming victims. That's in this one city. I, as a survivor, and I talk to other survivors and they agree with me, maybe we could form this group, and tell them our story and we can stop the violence.



JJ Janflone 15:49

I wonder, is it hard for you to now you know, being a dad, in Philly, right? Like, you've got kids that are going to be the age that you were when you got shot, that's got to be a hard thing to kind of hold mentally, right?

Oronde McClain 16:04

Of course, because, like, I got five kids, four sons and one daughter, and it's not like they live in the city, but I know they have friends and they talk about the violence, also. And you have all the schools in Philadelphia, they only would teach about violence. So everybody will be traumatized in some type of way. Some type of way. My kids see me on TV talking about this violence and I don't I don't know if they truly understand what I actually went through. And I don't want them to go through that at all.

Kelly Sampson 16:43

And you talked about, you know, the ripple effects of how it's not just the individual who has shot, but it's the person who shot the person and also their family, the victim's family and all the trauma. And you mentioned earlier, how one of the impacts for you was suicidality. And I'm wondering, you know, what, it's not easy to be open about that, and so I'm wondering, you know, what has motivated you specifically to be open about not just the physical aspect, but also the trauma and suicide and depression and how that also can result from being a victim of gun violence?

Oronde McClain 17:25

I feel like it's my family that pushes me, so for instance, my wife, she's a nurse, and I am a gunshot victim, so she has to take care of the kids, and also watch out for me, right? So me getting shot 22 years ago is still affecting everybody. So she has to be a wife, a mom, and a nurse when she would get home because I still have seizures in my sleep. So it's like, triple job for her. My kids, they see me having seizures. They don't know what a seizure is. So it's like, a triple flex for them also. My other family, they know I got shot 22 years ago, they're still traumatized. So they like, I don't know what's going to happen to them. So everybody is, everybody is affected. And people people get upset with me, when they say, oh, I don't know who my shooter is, but I wish I knew who my shooter was because I just play the devil's advocate. If I shot somebody, especially a 10-year-old child, I will be so hurt, right? I will be so hurt. I will just want that child to forgive me. So always, every interview, I'll go to, I'll tell them, and even if the shooter wasn't listening, or other shooters, listen, I forgive you. Because I don't want you to live your life in fear and be sad and go through depression. And so everybody is affected. So I'm telling you that I understand. I forgive you. Now, you can live your life happy. You don't understand if the shooter can try to commit suicide also, they could be going through the same thing the victims, going through therapy, trying to think that they won't commit suicide. Nobody knows that.

Oronde McClain 18:01

I think this is amazing, the the way in which you talk about forgiveness, t not just this huge fact of like giving forgiveness to somebody who hasn't been caught for causing you harm, but also just in the way like forgiveness is this healing thing for you and for other survivors. I think that's a really interesting way to, to sort of frame what you've gone through and what so many people in the U.S. go through.

Oronde McClain 20:09

Because listen, if, if I don't forgive them, I'm mad at myself. And I can't have my own foundation, telling everybody oh, it's going to be okay, but I'm still angry at the shooter. No, I'm not doing nobody justice if I'm still angry at the world. No! Forgive the person and let's move on. It was a mistake, everybody makes a mistake. Personally, like, would love to thank that person, like, listen, you shot me, you slowed me down, you made me realize life is important. Life is so important. And especially, so if I didn't get shot, maybe I wouldn't understand that life is so important and tou can't take it with a grain of salt. So I feel like getting shot is a lesson, a lot of people disagree with me, saying don't do that, we're going to find that person. So what, don't waste your time, move on. You could put all that energy into something else and that's positive.

Kelly Sampson 21:14

Pretty, pretty extraordinary in so many different ways. And one of those ways we haven't talked about yet, but definitely want to get into, which is not only have you in the middle of continuing, you know, over 20 years later to be rehabilitating from being shot when you were 10, but you're running a foundation and you're also setting an example for other people in

creating peace, and you produce a documentary. And the name of your documentary is "They Don't Care About Us" and we want to we got questions about it. But the first one is just what what's behind that title?

Oronde McClain 21:50

Okay, so they don't care about us. Like I just told you. I just got over being angry. I was angry at the world, not the shooter. I was just angry at the world that okay, I was in rehab, now, you kicked me out of rehab, kicked me out the hospital, and now you saying, just go live your life like a normal kid, huh? Like, how am I supposed to do that? You don't get no help at the hospital, you don't get no type of treatment. Nobody going to go check on you or say hey, are you okay? No city officials, nothing, nothing like that. So I interview three amazing gunshot victims. One was Dr. Harris, he was walking, who got off the bus, he got shot one time in the back and now he's a quadriplegic. And then you have Uhura, she got shot nine times by her boyfriend than he turned around and killed himself. And then you have Semaj, that I truly love, that was walking gtom school, got shot in the back of the head, but luckily, the bullet went in and out, so he don't have the same effects as somebody else that was shot. But they are survivors and they are pushing forward.

Oronde McClain 23:13

And I interview doctors, I interview politicians because I felt like politicians really don't care, doctors really don't care. And I interview these doctors, and they all became politicians and doctors, because somebody in their family died from gun violence or was affected by gun violence. So they was the 20 people that I talked about earlier that was affected by gun violence. And they made a decision and they said listen, I'm going to change the way that Philadelphia is going to run. Because I was I was a co-victim in my past life. So I just was like, amazed. At the end of the documentary, I explained it to everybody like, all the survivors say Oronde, why are you so angry? Nobody else pulled the trigger except for the person. So why are you angry at the politicians? Why are you angry at the doctors? They didn't shoot you. You didn't get shot 900 times, you got shot one time, it was a mistake, get over it and now spread youe love with the work that you're doing. So it made me push harder and made me get closer to the survivors and maybe closer to everybody because that was a valid statement. I'm angry at the world, but they didn't shoot me, so why am I angry? I need to spread my message and get over myself. I shouldn't be angry at nobody.

JJ Janflone 24:46

I mean, for all of our listeners. We're going to link to the documentary in the description of this episode, but please go watch it. We watched it. We were amazed, the survivors that you talked to were phenomenal but I was, I think kind of in the same way that you are, was really surprised at the folks who interviewed who, as you said came into this, like, they were like, I love Philly, so I'm going to fix Philly and this is how I'm going to do it.

Oronde McClain 25:13

One person can't fix the whole problem. But you have tons and tons of survivors and we all

think the same. We might as well just fight it together.

Kelly Sampson 25:23

Just wondering, was there anything that surprised you in the course of putting the documentary together or talking to people for it?

Oronde McClain 25:33

There was, it was surprising that everybody was blaming other people. Well, it's the mayor's fault. Oh, well, it's the police's fault, oh well. But nobody never said "it's my fault I didn't go vote," "it's my fault, I saw this person with a gun, it's my fault." Everybody wants to point the finger, but nobody wants to take the self blame. And I think especially in Philadelphia, if you see something, say something.

JJ Janflone 26:06

I could see how someone could hear that statement of like, well, but you didn't vote, as sort of kind of in a victim blaming way, but am I interpreting it right? That it's kind of a, you can't complain about gun violence and then not be active against it? Is that kind of where you're going with that? Am I?

Oronde McClain 26:24

Yes. If you didn't do anything, all the stuff that you could do in Philadelphia, especially with the politicians, you didn't go vote, but you blaming the mayor, or you're blaming the governor, you didn't go out and say well, I don't like the governor, I didn't like his campaign, I'm going to go vote for the other person. You just decided not to vote for nobody, nobody and just go to sleep that night. So you making Philadelphia a worse city because you didn't do anything.

Kelly Sampson 26:58

Wise words, where it's about making the best, the best of things and trying to push forward. And I'm wondering, you know, you have consistently highlighted, as you said, survivors, and why do you think it's so important to do that in this work?

Oronde McClain 27:14

Alright, so that's, that's the question I get all the time. I feel like, and that's just my personal thing. I feel like we went through it, we need to show that we survived for reason. We need to use our pain in a positive way. All the pain we went through, and all the survivors like on Facebook always get this quote, and say, listen, you have to find a purpose for your pain. You didn't go through pain for nothing. Why would you go through pain and just let it be? No, find a

purpose for it. I felt my purpose is to empower you, now I need you to not empower me, no, to empower somebody else to do the same thing. And we've saved one person, you saved the whole world. That's what I believe I feel like if I if I could reach one person, I did my job for the day.



JJ Janflone 28:14

That I mean, I can't think of better words to end on with our time. So thank you, so, so much, Oronde. Folks can find your documentary and your foundation and all of the great work in the description of our episode. But I just thank you, and I'm so glad you're with us.



]] Janflone 28:35

We've talked about it so many times on this podcast and survivors keep bringing it up, but I think it really does bear repeating, like shouting from the rooftops repeating, that you don't just get shot and pop up and you're fine, right? Surviving from a gunshot wound does not mean that everything is perfect and hunky dory after. survivors have to go through this really long process. And I think that we really need to highlight that more, as more and more people in the U.S. deal with, as he laid out, these ripple effects from shootings.

Kelly Sampson 29:03

Yeah, I mean, that certainly was a big takeaway for me in this episode is the fact that Oronde was shot when he was a child. He's now an adult, a grown man, and he still deals with the physical and mental impacts of being shot. And I just think about the fact that he is one person, but we have thousands of people each year who are shot and so scaling that up, it's it's an emergency of survivors. Obviously, it's an emergency of people who are killed, but there's definitely an urgent need to, number one stop people from being shot, but then when people are shot, to make sure they have services and care and support because it's such a it's a lifelong thing. So, I definitely take that away.



JJ Janflone 29:52

Want to share with the podcast? Listeners can now get in touch with us here at Red, Blue, and Brady via phone or text message Simply call our text us at 480-744-3452 with your thoughts, questions, concerns, ideas, whatever! Kelly and I are standing by.

Kelly Sampson 30:10

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