

TEXAS AFTER VIOLENCE PROJECT

Interview with Sara Mokuria

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Interviewer: Gabriel Solis

Videographer: Matthew Gossage

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ABSTRACT

Sara Mokuria saw her father, Tesfaye Mokuria, killed by two police officers in Dallas, Texas in 1993, when she was ten years old. Mokuria went on to co-found Mothers Against Police Brutality and is a prominent community organizer in Dallas. Mokuria is also the Associate Director for Leadership Initiatives with The Institute for Urban Policy Research at the University of Texas at Dallas. In her interview, Mokuria recalls her parents' personalities, her eclectic childhood, and their family life. She discusses details of the night her father was killed, and explains the impact the circumstances of his death had on her family as well as its changing impact on her in the years since it occurred. She describes meeting one of the officers who killed her father, and concludes the interview by discussing Mothers Against Police Brutality and the importance of changing policies and envisioning a radically different police force for the future. This interview took place on July 17, 2017, at the home of Sara Mokuria in Dallas, Texas.

GABRIEL SOLIS: Okay. So, today is July 17, 2017. We're in the home of Sara Mokuria. Is that how you say your last name?

SARA MOKURIA: Yes.

SOLIS: Present in the room are myself, Gabriel Solis and Matt Gossage behind the camera. Thank you again, Sara for inviting us over and we've explained a little bit about the project and you consent to be interviewed.

MOKURIA: Yes.

SOLIS: I really just want to start with you telling a little bit about your background, where you come from. You can go back as early as you want.

MOKURIA: Okay. Well, I come from Dallas. I was born and raised here in Dallas. I'm a first-generation Texan. My father is from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and my mother is from Savannah, Georgia. They were both passing through and met at NorthPark Mall of all places and fell in love, had me and never left, so that's our Texas origin story.

SOLIS: Why did your father come to Texas?

MOKURIA: My father was a political refugee from Ethiopia so he—and some of the story I don't know, but the parts of the story I know—he was in Ethiopia. He was working in a factory when he was like 14 or 15 years old and was really sick. This Italian doctor helped him get to Italy. He was in Italy for a while. From Italy, he applied for asylum in the United States and was able to get it. He came here as a refugee. And Dallas at the time was a resettlement city. It still is a refugee resettlement city, not so much from Ethiopia but from Iraq, Nepal, Syria, from all over the world.

At the time he came and was working for a white guy in Highland Park. He was kind of, I guess, the groundskeeper. It was around Christmas time that the guy had taken him to the NorthPark for, I guess, a lunch or something. My mom was—her sister was living in Dallas at the time. She was passing through trying to get to Hawaii, I think, and so she was living here, she was working as a waitress at the restaurant that they ate lunch or dinner at that day. Both of them I don't think expected to stay in Dallas.

SOLIS: Tell me your parents' names.

MOKURIA: My father is Tesfaye Mokuria and my mother is Vicki Mokuria.

SOLIS: Okay, and so your mother was passing through on her way to Hawaii.

MOKURIA: Right, so my mother was passing through on her way to Hawaii because she had a boyfriend there. He was there, he wasn't from there but he—I think she was on her way to Hawaii, she was going somewhere to meet her boyfriend.

SOLIS: Where was she coming from?

MOKURIA: I think she was a nomad so I don't remember exactly where she was before she came to Dallas but for a while she was living in Santa Cruz like in a teepee. I mean, both of my parents are eclectic. My dad actually had a girlfriend who was in Italy, who was expecting, I guess, to come as well. So both of them—it was unplanned. They had other things going on in their lives but I guess sparks were sparked and the rest is history.

SOLIS: So how long were they together until they—k

MOKURIA: Until they had me?

SOLIS: Yeah. Were you their first child?

MOKURIA: Yeah. I was their first child and not long after, I would say within that year, that year or the next year, I was born. I don't know the exact dates but I'm pretty sure, maybe, I don't know if my dad got here in '80, maybe he got here in '80 or '81. I was born in '82. It was a really short window.

SOLIS: Tell me a little bit about growing up, did you stay here in Dallas?

MOKURIA: Yeah, so we lived here in Dallas growing up. It was a really eclectic childhood. We lived mostly in East Dallas. We lived in East Dallas, we lived in Pleasant Grove. When I was a baby, I guess, and then they were just really working class, like, I think my mom, when she was pregnant with me, was working at a call center and cleaning houses. My dad was working in a bakery. He was doing different things like that.

That was all when I was a baby. My mom went to school, she went to UT-D to get a Master's degree. Then she became a teacher. During my childhood, she was—I grew up with her as a teacher, I always remember her as a teacher. My dad owned a landscaping business. And so I remember we would do these family adventures where we would just drive—which seemed like a really long way but now in retrospect I think it was maybe to Forney, like not that long, but we would drive and we would just go, we would just spend a lot of time as a family.

We would go and go to the country or we would go to festivals, free festivals around the city or we'd go to powwows or to Chinese New Year, just all kinds of different cultural events. We were the eclectic family that was always there in the midst of it. My dad

drove an F150. It was one of those trucks that when it stopped at a stop sign, everybody had to get out and push it. I remember riding in the back of the truck or just spending time as a family, my mom's a Buddhist and so she practices Nichiren Daishonin Buddhism. They proselytize. We'd go to a lot of meetings. We would do a lot of things together.

My dad loved animals and he would find birds or mostly birds or like turtles, like animals that needed help. He would bring them home and nurse them back to life. We had a room in our house that was full of animals. So we had birds. We had a goose. We had cats. We just had a lot of—and they were kind of hippie—ish so my dad had—at first he had really long dreadlocks. My mom has curly hair like mine but it was bigger. They were kind of a sight to see back in the 80s here in Dallas.

We weren't the norm I would say. But we had a lot of fun as a family. I mean even things like my dad like to pull a mattress into the backyard and we would sleep under the stars or we'd take a sheet in the front yard and eat watermelon and corn and dinner. He cooked dinner sometimes in the fireplace so we just did—I guess my childhood was kind of an adventure just because it feels like now things that would make up a movie, it's like, "This is not real." But it was real, just a quirky type of way of living, I guess.

SOLIS: Sounds like a really beautiful childhood.

MOKURIA: Yeah, it was. I mean, it had its, of course, low points and high points but overall, we were all, we have all strong personalities and we would have fun together. Even sometimes I think in the moment when you're with your family, you can be annoyed or irritated but then when you look back, all the memories are happy even the hard ones are—

SOLIS: Somewhere I read, I don't know if it was you or maybe it was your younger sister, describing your father as a nurturer. Is that what you mean in terms of his—how he took in animals and—

MOKURIA: Yeah, he was a really—He was an amazing man. He was a really gentle person in terms of, like, he was a gardener so that requires patience and love and tenderness and willingness to see things grow like when you start with the seed, you don't know what it will grow to but you have to have the patience. You have to have the belief that it can grow into something. I think he felt the same way about people. One thing was—it used to bother me when I was a kid. So, a lot of his clients were in North Dallas, were wealthier and white. When he would go to take care of their lawn, he would stop in by like the really fancy French pastries.

We don't need all this stuff. We don't get these things and they have enough like why are you giving it to them. He was like, "You always offer the best like that's just what you do. That's a reflection of your character," and even when people treated him less than, he always made it a point to treat them, treat other people better.

My mom always talks about the story—like, her parents are from Savannah, Georgia, well, they're originally from New York. They're deceased now, but they were middle-class Jewish folks. So, what was I saying, it was about my grandparents, so my grandparents, like, when my parents got married—well, they didn't get married at first. When they had me and when they decided to be a couple and they were living together and they had me, my grandparents were not happy and all this is stories from my mom. So, they were not happy, they didn't talk to my mom.

They had all these problems. I would say it's racism and I know before they died, we talked about it all and they would say, it wasn't just about race. My dad did drink and smoke weed and so did my mom, I mean at those times. I guess that wasn't the type of person that they wanted for the daughter but I don't think you can separate race out of it but, anyways, I say all of that to give context.

They came to visit Dallas once. When they came, my dad made reservations. When you're on 75, there's the Doubletree Hotel, it's like these two gold towers. He made reservations at that restaurant and made sure that he paid for everything. That was the kind of person that he was. Even if people didn't value him or treat him in the right way, he always went above and beyond to always treat other people better. So, whether it be them or anybody, that was just, he was a person who was all about respect.

I remember, we went to a powwow once. He had a parrot that he would take with him everywhere. He would keep it on his—I hated that parrot but he would keep it on. I don't remember, I think it was one of his clients found it and it spoke Spanish. I guess it had—I don't know, anyways, it would always yell at me and taunt me. I remember I would say like, "Mom." He's like, "Yes, what do you want?" I'm not even talking to you, stupid bird.

Anyways, he had that bird and he would take it with him everywhere on his shoulder. We had gone to this powwow. He plucked a feather from the parrot to give to the chief and the parrot like pinched him over his heart. He gave it to him and he said it caused all these feathers caused pain to the bird and even caused me pain because the bird pinched me. I'm giving this feather to you as an honor but also to remember all the pain that all these feathers cost and so that's the way he thought.

I think I said he spoke five languages. I don't know if I said, yeah. He spoke five languages so he could connect with a lot of people. He made it a point. There's tensions between Eritreans and Ethiopians for some folks, that's like a long—standing tension. He spoke languages from Eritrea and from Ethiopia and would connect with people. He spoke Spanish, he spoke Italian. He spoke English and so he was—even though he didn't really have a formal education past probably like eighth grade, he was really, he had a lot of knowledge base so he was really worldly and he never met a stranger.

Everybody was his best friend. That was something that always bothered my mom because we had a tight budget, but he would find some people on the street and bring them home, "Vicki, cook a big meal, we're going to have a party. These are my best

friends,” like that’s just kind of how he was. Every day, there was an opportunity for a celebration. That was just how he was. He always wanted to celebrate. He always wanted to connect with people and he always wanted people to feel comfortable, like I know even with me, he would take me to different people’s houses, random people he would meet and was like, “Go play with their kids.”

It doesn’t matter if they were in the most dirt-poor situation or the richest situation. He was like, "However people are living, whatever they’re doing, you fit in, you get in where you fit in and connect with people, make people feel comfortable."

SOLIS: Did he ever talk to you about his childhood growing up in Ethiopia? Did he ever share any memories with you?

MOKURIA: A lot of the way he would share those memories would be through discipline. So, if I was complaining about doing school work, he’s like, "You have paper, you have pencils, you have access to all these things that kids where I’m from don’t have access to, but kids there want to learn. They’ll take a stick in, draw in the dirt to do their letters and you’re complaining with all your books and all your stuff, you’re complaining." He would talk about that because, I mean, even though he lived in the city like he was more from like the countryside. So, he would tell me things like some of the little stories I remember is like when he had to go to the restroom, he had to go to an outhouse and people would, so people don’t hear you doing your business, would like bang rocks together. I mean, that’s just like random things, or he would do things like, which still feels like torture but like, say, he would use old-school medicine, so like, honey was a cure for everything. Like, honey or ice, honey everywhere or like, if I had sinuses, he’d stick butter up my nose and it makes you throw up all the phlegm.

I don’t suggest it. It’s a really painful process, but I would say those are the glimpses I would get into his childhood. He also has a lot of—I think he carried a lot of pain from his childhood because I still have tried to piece together the story but a lot of people who I think know the story are dead or there’s language barriers for me. But, from what I understand, his father raped his mother. That caused shame and created shame upon his mom and then he was being raised by an aunt and an uncle.

His father always denied him but then his father came and got him and took him and put him in a Catholic boarding school or something and then he ran away and then that’s how he ended up and working in a factory and different things like that. He had a really troubled and a hard childhood. I think there were a lot of unsolved questions for him and also pain that he carried. It wasn’t like something that he talked about all the time or like in a happy way. I mean, some things but I think there are parts of his story that caused him a lot of pain.

SOLIS: Where have you been able to get some of this?

MOKURIA: Get some of it?

SOLIS: Yeah.

MOKURIA: Well I—Gosh.

MATT GOSSAGE: Sorry. One second, I'll just adjust my mic. Sorry.

MOKURIA: No problem. What was I saying? I got into a real like—I would say maybe when I was, 19 years old I was really into like, roots and exploring family roots and history. I went to Ethiopia. He has brothers and a sister that live in Italy. I went to Italy and Ethiopia and try to meet family members and get pieces of his story. And so from that, and then also from my mom, from what she says. And everybody says slightly different stories and all of that is based on maybe their interpretation or what he told them or what they experience, what they know.

I think, for me, I went through the process then I stopped because I was frustrated. I'm like, "Is everybody lying to me?" Everybody who would know is dead or is inaccessible, all the language barriers so it doesn't even really matter. But it does matter and it is difficult. There is a pain in not being able to know your full history and all of the stories and especially with my dad not being here anymore like knowing his story also helps me feel a little closer to him and understand him more. Those are the ways that I was able to learn different parts of the story.

SOLIS: Are you still searching for it?

MOKURIA: Yeah. Yes and no. I don't have the same driving force that I had maybe 15 years ago, but I'm still interested in knowing because it tells me about pieces of myself and piece of him and why he did what he did and what his motivating factors were. It's hard because time doesn't work with you. People die. A lot of the people who I think knew different parts of the stories are no longer here and so then you lose stories when people leave. So much of it wasn't recorded.

Actually, one of my uncle's wives, so my aunt, sent me some pictures of him the other day of when I guess he was probably in his early 19, 20. It was a real trip to get to see those. I've never seen those pictures before. It made me happy and it made me think who was this guy, and what was his motivating force, and also I think another part that's hard about searching out his story is—well, there are things that I think I know. Then when I learn new things, it changes the story or changes the story that I've created, the narrative that I've created or thought.

You have to be also willing to accept and hear and learn all the different layers. I think I am open to it, it's not like—I'm not doing genealogy every single night. It's not my driving force right now but it is something that's there.

SOLIS: So, Sarah, my family is from Texas and even then, it's hard to figure out what's truth, what's story and where people are intentionally—

MOKURIA: Keeping things out.

SOLIS: It's not sometimes pleasant.

MOKURIA: It's not what you talk about. Right.

SOLIS: So I think it's in every family.

MOKURIA: Shame, and also my father being a refugee when I went to Italy—like, one of the biggest shocks was his birthday was different than the birthday we know. I don't know if that—and I know that's just part of the process of coming to America for so many people, parts of your story that change, your name, the date, your age, all these different things. The other thing is everybody in Italy was calling him Italo Trombino—like, who was that, that's not my dad.

I think that was the name that his father put on him but it wasn't his name so in all of that, all of those things are things I don't know. He's not here to talk about those things. Everybody has different pieces of the story, but who knows? There's a part of me that's just learned to sit with that and I even think about myself, I think about—I have a son and I write, so one thing I do is, when he was born, I wrote him a letter. I write him a letter every year on his birthday. Sometimes I go back and I read what I wrote and I think like I think about what I wrote down and what was going on in my mind at that time, what my motivation was for saying what he said and how I told the story.

I think that's true for all of us, how we're feeling, the parts of the story we need to tell, what we feel at that time, what we need to feel, what we want to feel all play into it. I resigned to a whole lot of lower letter truths versus capital Truth. I don't know if that actually exists other than within the moment and even within the moment, every different perspective tells that truth in a different way. That's kind of how I feel about my dad's story and all the different parts of him I feel like, there are who he was before I knew him has my dad. I know him from his friends, I know him from people who are his clients, from my mom, from his family and my family, but part of that, we'll never know.

SOLIS: Did he have any writings or books or pieces of art or anything that you still see him in, that you have?

MOKURIA: Well he, I don't know where it is but I remember right before he died it was almost like—or really before he was killed—it was almost like he was closing tabs. My bike had gotten stolen and he had told me one day to make the table, set the dishes out and so I did. He wrote me a check for the amount of a new bicycle. I have that check somewhere or my mom saved it. I think I have one of his old business cards, a T—shirt of his, a bracelet. He played the flute so we have one of his old flutes.

My mom—so he had this gold pendant that was his favorite when like he dressed up he would wear it. My mom made a cast of it and after his death, she melted her wedding ring

and his wedding ring. It made exactly—that gold made three necklaces, one for me, my sister and my mom so I have that necklace which isn't the pendant but it's a copy of it which is made from his wedding ring. Pictures.

We have some old letters that people wrote him and some of his stuff but some cassette tapes like I know there's one with his voice on it. I was looking for it the other day and some of his old cassette tapes that he would listen to. Some of the stuff I don't know where it is like it's stored away but not a whole lot of stuff. In his checkbook because English was not his first language, like in his checkbook, I remember he had all the numbers written out so when he would go to write a check, he could see them all so he wasn't like—he didn't write in English so we don't have, he didn't keep journals.

SOLIS: Do you wear the necklace?

MOKURIA: I do sometimes. I wear it on special occasions. Once actually, it almost was stolen. This guy ripped it off my neck. I don't know what I was thinking but I just grabbed it back out of his hand. He didn't fight me, he just ran away. I was really happy that I was able to get the necklace back. So, I don't always like to take it everywhere because I don't want to lose it but I do wear it. A lot of times like if I have a speaking engagement or a job interview or something like that, it's kind of one of my lucky or special things that made me feel safe.

I have a pair of earrings. I remember that he bought me, at that same powwow that I told you where with the feather, he bought me a pair of earrings and I have those that I kept. I think that's about it.

SOLIS: He sounds like an incredible man.

MOKURIA: Yeah, he was. I mean he was good and bad and everything in between, but he was. Now thinking, I didn't always appreciate him then because he's a really stern father, but I still think about all the lessons that he tried to teach me and the way he was trying to raise me—or did raise me for the first 10 years of my life so I think about the lot. I think about just his own perseverance and his character. I appreciate—I can be a little judgmental. He didn't see people for all the materialistic things. He saw people's hearts, I feel like.

He could connect to people's stories and everything no matter what their life circumstance was. I don't feel like I'm always that way, the way that he was.

SOLIS: If you're comfortable with it, I'd like to hear a little bit about what happened but only insofar as you're wanting to talk about it and if you don't then ...

MOKURIA: Yeah, I don't mind. Like I said, my father did use drugs and alcohol at different points in his life. I would say now in retrospect, I would

say he was self-medicating for pain, emotional pain and trauma that he had experienced in his life. He had stopped all of that when I was five years old.

When I was 10 he—well, right before he died—he had started drinking and smoking again. I would say—again this is all in retrospect—now I have this language to say it but I think he was probably in a manic cycle, like probably had suffered from depression. He would have insomnia. He would go and ride his bike all night long or he couldn't sleep, almost like he had this energy like he knew something bad was going to happen.

We had some Eritrean neighbors who would do the Ethiopian coffee ceremony where you basically read your, I don't want to say fortune, but read your future through the coffee grinds. He had done that ceremony right before he died, not the same day and it was like he knew something bad was going to happen. When he was looking at it, it troubled him and he was really agitated. I say all that to give the context. Like I said he had broken my mom's CD cassette player and he had bought her a new one. He had written that check for me for my bike. He had fixed things in the house.

It's almost like he was, it's like his spirit knew something bad was going to happen, but the night he died, he had been out with the guys who worked for him doing lawn work. They came home and they unloaded the truck. I want to say it was probably a Tuesday or a Wednesday. I'm pretty sure it was a Wednesday. It was a normal school night where my mom was cooking dinner, my baby sister was, I don't know, just being a baby. I don't remember what I was doing, maybe playing, maybe doing homework, just kind of doing—everybody was doing their own thing.

My dad came home with the guys. They unloaded the truck, like the lawnmowers and the gas and all of that stuff. I remember my dad calling all of us, me and my mom, and she grabbed my sister, we were all in the middle of our own thing and he was like, "We all need to come outside and look at the sunset," so we all went outside. We all stopped what we were doing. We went out there and we watched the sunset.

It was one of those beautiful Texas sunsets with that, the really magenta, strong magenta and orange and pink and it just it's like a fire in the sky, like this beautiful sunset. We just stood there in this peaceful little moment watching the sunset together then we all went back to our own things, getting the dinner ready and then he left to go take his guys home.

He left to go take his guys home. I don't remember what I did for the rest of the evening but I went to bed and—sorry—I went to bed and the next thing that I knew, I was being woken up by my mom in the middle of the night. I can say what I know happened in between time from what I've been told by my mom. But I guess when he came back home, he was inebriated. He had been drinking. He had smoked and he was talking suicidally.

She said he had said something like, "You're going to see blood tonight," and they were arguing and fighting. She was like, if you kill yourself or if you kill me like what about

our girls? So, I don't know all what happened because I was asleep, but she called the police to have them come and take him to Parkland Hospital so that he could—she said he was not himself that night. I guess it took a—from her recollection or what she told me like took a while for them to come and he had calmed down. They were going to go for a walk and it was like right when they were going to go for a walk, the doorbell rang, it was these two officers, two white officers who told her and when they came, he ran to the kitchen.

This is another part of the context. Here's a guy who was, when he first got here, living in Highland Park which is if you're not familiar, it is a super wealthy, super white enclave that incorporated their own city within the city limits of Dallas. So, here he had dreadlocks. He was constantly harassed, not—by Highland Park police, by Dallas police so he didn't—racial profiling and—there are letters, I have letters where he had gone down and made complaints about officers.

He had been tased multiple times. Seeing the officers triggered him, I'm sure. He ran back over into the kitchen kind of like where the kitchen and the garage were. I guess he had gone into the garage. The officers told my mom to wake me and my sister up so she did and we were—the way our house was set up was like when you came in, there's a foyer, it was an open living room. It was a two-story house and so there was a staircase that was open, there's a little landing and it would go up the stairs and even from upstairs, you could look over into the living room.

Under that was the kitchen which had a little bay window that you could see through and back there was the garage. There's another room back there. The officers came in, there was one that was standing at the front door and another one had gone upstairs and was standing on the stairs and I don't know why he was standing there. So, the two of them are there. And we had a couch.

There's a little foyer. My mom—and myself, she was holding my sister—was standing right before you get into the foyer by the couch on the edge of the couch. My dad came running from back in the kitchen and the garage area. He had a portable phone and a kitchen knife in his hand and he came and he ran and he stood in front of us. He was standing like this. It was all really fast. I don't remember what the officer said. I just remember shots being fired. I remember my mom ducking down and me ducking down and my dad, just his body just collapsing and falling onto the ground.

My mom was holding my sister in one hand and was holding I feel like his foot with the other kind of like just wailing and crying. I went up on the little landing part and I was looking over. Well first before I did that, the officer was right there, it was so like—I remember saying to him, "Call 911!" Like, I mean, that's all I knew that they tell you in the emergency. I just remember him, it just felt like he was moving slow but all of it seems—my perception of time and all that happens is probably really off—but I feel like he wasn't doing anything and then I ran up on the little landing.

just wanting to be with my mom. I don't even remember like, "Did your parents fight?" I don't even remember what all the questions were. There's a part of me that I guess hasn't been ready to—I'm sure if I did an open records request, I could hear that tape if it still exists.

I assume it would but I've never—I have like a copy of my dad's autopsy but I don't have all their case files. I would be interested to hear what those questions were and what my response was, because I just remember feeling, like, whatever I have to say to get out of here. And not knowing what the process was or what it was for.

I remember finally them being done and so I'm like, okay I get to see my mom now. And they said, No, she's still doing her interview. So, I still had to wait which was just like, devastating for me. My mom told me that we stayed at her friend's house that evening. I don't remember that. The next part of my memory of that was, I guess at that point my mom's parents, my grandparents had come into town and they stayed in a hotel. We stayed in that hotel because it all happened in our house.

A lot of people don't know, but when your house becomes a crime scene in that way, you have to clean it up. My mom's friends cleaned my dad's blood up and there are bullet holes in our house and carpet torn. They cleaned all that up. We were lucky enough to have family and friends to stay with and to be able to stay in a hotel and not have to go home and sleep there.

There are a lot of people who don't have that privilege. It's even ironic to even call it a privilege but it's an acknowledgment of it being a privilege that we didn't have to go home to that that night but we did live in that house for years later. It was tormenting every day to walk through that same front door. That was what happened that night. I remember, I think the last thing I remember him saying to me was I love you when he was leaving after we had seen that sunset. It was eerily ordinary, an eerily ordinary day that just ended in the most violent way.

SOLIS: Do you want a break or anything? Are you okay?

MOKURIA: I'm okay. I'm sorry about all the noise.

SOLIS: No. It's fine, it's okay. We can edit. Well, thank you for sharing that. I know you shared it before but I can't imagine having to talk, tell the story of it repeatedly.

MOKURIA: Yeah. It's really when my, it was when I was pregnant with my son. I remember I had this one dream. I have like reoccurring dreams of like water, like the ocean and pools, just different water and houses are like two recurring themes in my dream but I remember I had this one dream. It was around the anniversary of his, of my dad's death. And it was in that house. It was in the house. It was my best friend was there. She was helping me and we were moving out. I was moving all

these clothes and all the clothes had all these dried flowers sewn into them. It was really weird.

But anyways, we're just moving out of this house and I remember waking up and crying, like I woke up and I was bawling, I was bawling, I was bawling. I felt like I've moved out like I felt symbolically like I moved out of that house. It's not as painful to tell a story now. There are years where I never even told the story. There are still like I said I haven't listened to that tape. There are parts of it that I—parts of that that I still haven't opened up. I think part of the most uncomfortable part too is not only on my end but it's a really horrible story to tell and I hate to put it on other people like the burden of hearing the story for other people. I don't want people to feel sorry for me. It creates an awkwardness or people cannot imagine it. There's a part of me that doesn't like sharing it because of that too.

SOLIS: What happened in the aftermath? What happened with the police officers?

MOKURIA: Nothing happened to them. They both still work for the force unless they, I'm pretty sure they haven't retired. I'm sure they're coming towards retirement age. They've moved up. I didn't go to school for a while, maybe a week or so which was also really even though it's a blip, it was on the news, it was in the newspaper so I wasn't there but I guess the counselor went and talked to my class. They all were—I want to say forced but asked, I guess—to write me a letter, so they sent me all these sympathy letters and a bear.

I felt really uncomfortable and different, and it felt uncomfortable to even go back to school because I had known everybody was talking about me, everyone was talking about my family, about my dad like I didn't know, how was I supposed to interact. I don't think people knew how to interact with me. It just created this barrier between me and the world. I remember John Wiley Price and The Warriors protested, so there was protest not like now but there were protests and different things that my mom tried to get a lawyer to take the case and no lawyers would take the case because he had a weapon or he was armed with a knife.

It went to the grand jury and it was a non-indictment. That was the end of it for the officers. For us, I mean, I think about my mom and I think about—the way she chose to live was her activism like trying to create a life where we lived instead of just survived was, I think, became her driving force. But I mean our life was in shambles. My mom fought for two years for my sister and I to be eligible for a crime victims' compensation because in Texas, we have crime victims' compensation but victims related to police violence are the only victims who are outside of that circle of support.

It took her two years to get us eligible for counseling services. My mom was a single mom. I mean he didn't have life insurance. He didn't have anything. It left our family in a financial deficit. We were all emotionally depleted and traumatized. So, we just try to make sense of a life. Afterwards, I remember my mom kept a box for a while where

when we would have memories of my dad, where you could put—like I saw a flower and I thought of you or draw picture or do things like that to keep him alive, just a really dark and depressing period.

I have so much more compassion and respect for my mom now. I can't even imagine what she was going through at that time. It became unbearable for me to live in the house and so I was like we have to leave, we have to move. It was really difficult for her to financially make that happen. She eventually did a short sell on the house. We moved into an apartment because I was just, it was driving me crazy. I was like losing my mind. I became just rage filled so I was really a difficult child, I was angry.

I remember I started wearing extra-large clothing. I'm petite-ish now but I was always small framed. I was wearing like men's sized large shirts and shorts and things. I would really wear baggy clothes and I would pull my hair back. I think looking back now, I was just trying to disappear. I felt like I just, it was like I said there was a separation between me and the world and I just, I didn't know how to engage with people, I didn't know how to—There was just-felt like a Grand Canyon and I just wanted to disappear.

I think that was a way, like trying to disappear in clothing was a way I tried to disappear, but I was also just so angry and I made my mom's life miserable. My mom didn't know like she was, I have a lot more—I was angry then because I felt like I felt really abandoned by her. I felt abandoned by my dad. I felt abandoned by everybody. I realize now, like, I dunno what anybody could have given me, but I think my mom, my mom was really just trying to financially make it, like keep all of us going.

My sister was one. She was trying to raise a toddler. Her attention was really there. It was a really, there's one picture I saw, like a family picture of us, I think at that time my sister was maybe—I don't know, we were all a little older but we just look like the Addams family, like so depressed. It's just like we just looked so, there wasn't a lot, I don't remember a lot of happiness. I mean we had happy moments but it was just. I had so much anger and I didn't even know, it was anger from all these different angles and all these different places and I just didn't even know how to articulate it or make sense of it or why I was so angry or who was I angry at.

I was angry at the police officers. I was angry at the system. I was angry at my dad, I was angry at myself like why didn't I yell stop. I felt guilty. What did I duck down? Why did I survive? I felt like I was saving myself by ducking down instead of standing in front of him. I felt like I was disloyal to my father. It was just I had all kinds—just a whirlwind of anger and sadness and depression. Then I was also a preteen girl on top of that so that was not a pretty time in my life. It was really difficult.

SOLIS: Did your mother and you and your sister, did you all have—and now that her parents were now living here—did y'all have, did she have friends or a spiritual community? Where did she find her community after this tragedy?

MOKURIA: I mean her Buddhist community, my mom is very religious. She just has that keep going spirit. That was where she gained support. And I would say she was really supported spiritually and emotionally through that. I think her parents also, like I remember at my dad's memorial service and my grandparents speaking about him in a positive way and that was the first time I had ever heard that. It pissed me off honestly, really was like, it made me feel like all these people who didn't appreciate him in his life like now you have good things to say. But I didn't even know I was mad about that then if that make sense.

I was mad about so many different things and angry about so many different things that I couldn't even, it was like a piece of concrete, just—a crane, just putting it down on me like tons of them. I was—even now sometimes I think about when things happen, it takes my ability to even process away, it was like a numbness almost. I just couldn't, there's just so many layers of anger and sadness and frustration. But my mom I would say her friends and just her own—she, I remember her saying to me once too, she was just like if it wasn't for you girls, I would've just died with him but I think she was just driven by raising us. She put all of her energy and time into raising us and to her Buddhist practice. That's kind of what got her through I would say.

SOLIS: How about you?

MOKURIA: I was really self-destructive. So, I hung out with, I think, like the alternative kids who—everybody who was like “F this world,” that was like, “Okay this is my community.” I felt separated. I just was, I was a tornado. Nobody could control me. Nobody could discipline me and I almost, I felt almost licensed to act however I wanted, wherever I wanted because I'm like, after what I've been through, sorry, after what I've been through, like what else is there? I just was, I was uncontrollable and then also like just I couldn't deal with the regular things that go—the things that happened in school.

I remember in sixth grade, I don't know why but they showed us the movie, *The Last of the Mohicans*. I lost it. I was triggered by everything and what was I saying? I was talking about just how I was as a kid. Yeah, I was just so—I felt like, I think—like I said when I wore those big baggy clothes and then I wore like I remember like everything I wore was just in some way I think resistance to whatever was normative, I feel like. The pain was unbearable. Like, I remember a girl in seventh or eighth grade and told me about cutting like cutting herself and I started cutting myself.

Before I was cutting myself, I would rip my nails off from the base, like rip my whole nails off. I would destroy my things, I was very destructive. I was just very angry and very destructive. They were try—my mom tried. She tried to put me in different types of therapy and stuff and like just none of it worked. I couldn't connect with anybody.

In ninth grade, I took a bottle of sleeping pills—like over 40 Tylenol sleeping pills, and tried to kill myself. But also in a really dramatic way. I don't think I really wanted to die. I think I was just like crying out for help, because my mom was like—I took them at

night and I made it through the whole and I actually ironically didn't sleep that whole night. In the morning she was like, "You don't look good, like maybe you have the flu or something, you should stay home from school."

If I had, I would've died. I was like, no I want to go to school. It's almost like I wanted to die in public, I don't know, so I got to school and then by the second or third period, I was throwing up vile or not vile, but bile. I had just left the class and I went and I remember one of the teachers like you need a hall pass. I was like no I'm just going to the nurse. I got to the nurse and I told her what happened. I think she didn't even believe me but she called my mom and then my mom didn't believe me because the nurse didn't really believe me and my mom was like well we're going to go—I have to go run an errand before I take you to the hospital.

I remember throwing up yellow bile in her car and said like, "Oh my God," so she just took me to the hospital but it was too late to pump my stomach because it had all absorbed into my system but they gave me some—I had to stay in the hospital and they gave me some medicine and that was like the first time I was really in the hospital ever. I don't know I think I was cleaning out the garage a while back and I found old art I was making like in seventh and eighth grade.

I was like, "Wow, I need to send this to the Association of Psychologists or something. Like this is what depression looks like." I mean everything was cries for help. I was just in the darkest place, just unbearably in a dark place. Really a turning point for me was in ninth grade when I met one of my best friends, Ashley, who was kind of like, "You're off, you're weird but you're cool, but also like you're a bitch. You're really hard to be around."

I was just kind of like the same attitude I always have. Like, I have a right. You don't even know what I've been through. I didn't even tell anybody my stories. I'm like you just don't even know what I'm carrying. She was like, my mom, her mom had died of cancer, of leukemia when she was 10. She's like, my mom died when I was 10. My dad's on crack. We all carry stories, you're not the only one. I'm not out here raging out like this. I had never met anybody who had a story.

Well other people had stories because actually one of the therapies that they sent me was to this camp where—like a summer camp for a week—where all the kids there had lost a parent which was really traumatic. I was just like, that was really a traumatic experience. But it was different, like she was the first person who was just like you don't have license to be this way in the world and also like I'm going to—I like you, like I'm going to be your friend but I'm not going to accept you acting in this type of way.

I think that was kind of a turning point for me of like really dealing. I also I was at a performing and visual arts school and I had a teacher, a theater teacher who introduced us to Anna Deavere Smith, who does amazing work. She's an amazing thespian. One of the things that she does is she tell stories and she plays every character. It was a small class. His name is Jeff and he had us all do a piece like in Anna Deavere Smith's style. I did the

day my dad was murdered. I wonder where that tape is too. I think that was the first time I really started processing and recognizing where all my anger and pain was coming from.

SOLIS: That's really interesting that you chose to perform—

MOKURIA: Yeah, I mean that class, I really feel like the theater department at the time had put all of the misfits or the difficult kids in one class. There were like five of us. It was a really small class and there was me and Ashley. She's the star. She was the popular girl, winter ball queen but she was also really dramatic so she was difficult to deal with in a different way. We were all difficult to deal with in different ways. I remember there is a guy, Tony. That was like post Columbine so anybody like they were checking everybody's lockers. I remember he was this white kid who wore this trench coat and he was singing some lyrics that—people already thought he was weird—but then he sang some lyrics that have the word bomb in it or something so they wanted to ship him off.

They had all of us in this class with Jeff and he, he was an amazing teacher like he would take us to, my school is in the arts district, so he would take us and we would go to the art museum. We would go to art museum and we would be in the different galleries and he was like, we would just do poetry inspired by the galleries. He told us his personal stories and we called him Jeff, by his first name.

We built a rapport that made it a safe space to share and everybody was, and I think the other girl who was in the class was Zoey. She was kind of this like Gothic white girl. We were just an eclectic little group but everybody was sharing their stories like their pain and happiness and stuff so it felt like a safe space. I feel like it was all that time that I started. It was the first time where I was actually processing instead of holding in so I guess I was maybe 14, 15 at the time so it took me about 4 to 5 years to not just—I had just been bottled. I was just numb, I couldn't even grieve for four to five years and then that was my first year of starting to acknowledge my pain.

SOLIS: I want to, I've still got a couple more areas that I want to talk with you. You still have a little time. Do you want to take a little break or anything?

MOKURIA: Yeah, no, that's fine. We're good, we're good.

SOLIS: Do you want to take a break or anything?

MOKURIA: Or if you need one, okay, yeah I'm good.

SOLIS: I think in one of the interviews you gave like let's say 2014, you said you went through sort of different phases with particularly around how you regarded police. At one point, you want to become a lawyer to put the police

officers who did it in jail, and then you hated police and then you sort of shifted and saw police violence as a systemic problem. I've seen you talk about this in this way before. Can you tell me more about that process of going from your anger at the specific police officers, to sort of where you are now working with police violence at a systemic level.

MOKURIA: Well I think at that time, so in the 90s and even still to this day—

GOSSAGE: Excuse me, I'm sorry, thank you.

MOKURIA: Bless you. Even still to this day, the way we, as a society, think about police violence is very hyper-localized for the most part. It's a theater between an individual and a local officer. We don't see it and we don't articulate it in a systemic way in the way the death penalty is or other issues. Although, a lot of that's changed post—Ferguson and post—Mike Brown but especially at that time, it was a personal trauma, a personal pain that I carried around and, quite frankly, a personal shame because the automatic assumption is your dad did something wrong, he was a bad person.

Your family is bad, you're bad and police are good. They always do everything right and so the system is right and those who engage with the system and are killed or hurt by it are the ones who are wrong. We're all the bad guys. But all poor, all black and brown people become the bad guys. That's like, when you start understanding that it's systemic, that everybody is considered, everybody who comes into contact in this way, all vulnerable people are being put in that position.

I was able to—once I realized this isn't just my story, that this is a story that was a story way before it happened to my family and has continued to happen after my family, that it's bigger than us and so many of the same pieces and the same issues come out and so that's when I started really seeing it as a systemic issue. I think originally as a little girl, my idea of justice was putting people in jail. That's the whole idea of like I want to be a lawyer and I want those officers—and part of it no office and no lawyers would take our case.

I'm going to grow up and be the lawyer that avenges my father and stands up for him in a way I wasn't able to in terms of I didn't run out and stop them from killing him but I can get justice for him. And then I learned and realized that even if I became a lawyer like how unviable that was as like a vehicle towards justice, then there's a part of me, I have compassion for police officers and there's a part of me that also hates a lot of them.

It's not that I hate them as individuals. I hate the system of policing as it exists in America. There's a part of me that is, what's the word, there's a part of me that doesn't understand the decision individuals make to join that system. That's not a hatred towards those people. I get it. People need jobs and people have their own ways of thinking and things. That's why I say try to have compassion, but that's hard for me to say like how can you choose that. I think really in college it was like I went to the New School

University and again a privilege to go to this amazing, at the time, place that had a really progressive—for the most part, not our president. That was a lot of issues. There were a lot of people, the professors, some of the students, the energy there, had a paradigm of seeing the world that introduced me to movements and systemic issues and recognizing where all of our lives fit into this larger system.

I gained a worldview and a frame for which, a paradigm for which to understand the world which was deeply healing for me because I had personalized so many things and had carried shame not only around that incident but around race, around class, around everything. Everything was shameful and personal. And then I realized so many of us are feeling this way because we're alienated and that's intentional and so I really learned all those things in New York, in school.

It was a gradual process and a journey. Today, like I say, I still hate policing as it is. I feel like we need a complete and a radical overhaul, that we have to radically rethink the position police play in our communities. I think we have to revive what it means to be in a community and how we solve problems. I think there is too much of an emphasis on the criminal justice system and even the things that we call police for.

There's so many other ways to deal with those issues and I think that the role that police should play is very small and should be very specialized and everything else that's under their purview should go away. But, I also—like I said on a human to human level, I have compassion for folks who I mean officers are working—class people right just like TSA security guards, parking meters, right? There's so many jobs that I don't know the circumstances that draw people to get in the positions there.

I try to keep myself, I try to remember that to keep myself from becoming too judgmental but I think the best way I can articulate it is my first way of thinking about things as a kid was things go through the criminal justice system and I'm going to be a lawyer so I can get it done and not really understanding and knowing how the system had failed us and how it is set up and designed to fail in some ways, and then moving from that to just having fear of police and just hating them just hating the whole system, to also recognizing the systemic nature and now I would say I'm in a place where I think I have a both in.

There are some things that can be mitigated and changed through policy and through reform and then there are other things that have to be totally dismantled, so that's where I am. Hate and anger are things that I try to keep out of my life because I remember my son's father, his mother. One thing that she said to me, which was profound advice, was being angry at somebody else is like drinking poison hoping they'll die. I was like, "Okay, it's hurting me, my anger, my hatred hurts me. It changes the quality of my life, and I'm not—I'm unwilling to give that. Enough has been taken away."

SOLIS: Is it—I think I read somewhere that you met with or tried to meet with one of the police officers?

MOKURIA: Yeah, I did.

SOLIS: Tell me what—how did that come to be?

MOKURIA: Okay so there are two officers that were involved and when I got, when I became pregnant with my son, it was a turning point in my life, a lot of things were going on and I sought out counseling. It was at this place that is closed now, which is a shame, but it was for victims of crime and they offered free counseling and they had been open for two decades. And they lost funding. It was a nonprofit, they lost funding. Any victim of any crime could go there for free and get counseling. So, I went there.

SOLIS: What was the name of it?

MOKURIA: It was, I want to say like Crime Victims Counseling, like a really basic name. I can look it up and tell you. I think it's a devastating loss that we don't have that in our community anymore. I started going to counseling and the counselor, sorry, I started going to counseling and the counselor at the time was—I was pregnant. She was trying to help me work through my trauma and what was going on.

I think it's like at crisis points or at stress points where I'm triggered like later in time. Earlier it was like an everyday thing and now I think it's more pulse points. So at that time, she was just working through the counseling process and one of the things she talked about is have you ever thought about confronting them or talking to them. I was like, "No way."

One of the reasons I really didn't want to was because I was afraid, one of the reasons I don't want to is because I was afraid that if I talk to them, they wouldn't even remember what happened, that they would, he would've just been another person they killed. What was hard for me about that was my solace came from imagining them as being tortured by killing him like being—even though they never went through the justice system, I felt like you can't kill somebody, you can't murder somebody in that way and live a good life.

I felt like, I hate to say pleasure, but the way I felt, the way I was able to have any sort of peace was feeling like they're just as tortured as me and so I was scared that if I met with them or if I talked to them and they weren't tortured, then I had no justice. There was no sense of—just I don't know, that was what I was holding onto. She really encouraged me to reach out to them and so I did. I called both of them. I looked them up and I called both of them at the department, at the Dallas Police Department. Amari go.

I called both of them at the police department and I was really vague. I just said hi. I don't even think I said my whole name. I said my name is Sara and you really impacted my life and I'd like to meet with you. I guess it was a trick in a way to—they could've been the hero so that they would meet with me without knowing, I didn't want them to

know. One officer never called me back. The other one was a detective at the time called me and met with me. It was powerful and hard and fucked up and so many different things.

It was a short meeting but he met with me and he was like, “Oh I’m so happy.” He was like so happy when he met with me. He was like, “I’m so happy you reached out to me.” I’ve thought about you over the years. It was affirming that he remembered everything, he remembered it but that piece gave me solace like, okay it wasn’t just like another day at work. It stuck with him but he was like because he was saying I have a daughter your age and I had always wondered what happened to you and her friend was named Sarah and I always pray for you in church, almost like we were on the same side.

What bothered me, what really started choking my throat up was it was almost like in his mind he had—he had thought of himself as the hero, like he had saved me and our family from this monster who was my dad. I was like no, he was not a monster. It was really hard for me to have that meeting. I think it was like maybe it was 10 minutes at the most, 10 or 15, I ended it. I was like, I can’t do any more of it. But I took pictures of my dad with my little sister, my dad’s business card, I wanted him to know, you killed a business owner.

You impacted the livelihood of multiple families because he employed multiple men who are making a living for their families, you killed that on top of killing my father. I want you to know who my dad was. I want you to see pictures of him happy and holding my sister and see him the way we saw him and not as this monster that you’re painting. There was tension there because he had this story and I had my story but the peace that I got in it was that he remembered and that he had to go through his own process. That’s what gave me also compassion and realized the way we think about these killings, the way we frame them is around the family like the victim’s families and stuff, rightfully so.

But, these officers are also impacted, their families are also impacted, they also have to carry those stories with them even if they don’t ever get indicted or convicted, perhaps it doesn’t. I haven’t done the research to know how it’s impacting their story and it’s a completely, to me, it’s a completely uneven and unequal power dynamic but I say that to say multiple communities, our whole like I feel like everybody is impacted because they have neighbors too.

They have marriages, they have kids and they all have to deal with all that comes with dealing with that traumatic moment, that decision and so that’s what woke me up to, maybe our families and our lives don’t matter enough in this society to stop this but perhaps if we widen the lens for folks to understand the depth and range of the impact and the trauma that this creates not only on our side but in the homes of these officers, mostly white officers and their white kids and their white wives that folks will care and change if it’s not enough to just do it because of humanity and what’s right.

After my sister, and I have a—It was her best friend in high school who became my adopted sister after they graduated college, my mom decided to go back to school. She

moved to California. By this time, I had already moved back to Dallas. I was living other places so she packed up her whole life and decide to go to get a second Master's degree and moved to California so then I became her renter.

SOLIS: Oh it is? That's nice, it's a nice house.

MOKURIA: Yeah I know it's like it was supposed be a two—year agreement but then after she got that degree, she decided she wanted to get a PhD. Now she's at Texas A&M and so now I've been here three years and I don't know if we'll ever leave. We're really comfortable, yeah.

SOLIS: Like I said I just have a couple more questions. I mean this has been a really, from my perspective, really good interview and I just appreciate your openness.

MOKURIA: Yeah I've just been telling y'all everything and then you get the transcript back and I just leave "My name is Sara."

SOLIS: I hope not.

MOKURIA: I don't say any of this. No I mean I think honestly it's important. I know this world does not reward radical honesty but I think it's important that I always, like I taught high school for a while and I'm like, "Look, I know I've lived through the depths of my own personal hell to here. I know we can change and people can change and grow." So, I think it's important that I'm honest about all of those things even though they're difficult to talk about and say and there's stigma around all of those things.

SOLIS: I mean this is why I love interviewing, this kind of interviewing, which is like I said very much leaving, creating a space where people tell their own stories without me interjecting all the time. I always learned so much during these interviews and they're important for people to hear.

MOKURIA: People do need to understand and hear and it's like you can't even, you can't even articulate it all. There's just no way to capture the fullness of it all.

SOLIS: Okay, can we jump back—

Matt: Yeah.

SOLIS: When we were on the phone last week sort of talking about doing the interview, you said something that I thought was really interesting and I'm wondering if you'd be willing to talk more about it. You said that you notice that your young son sometimes cries out for your father.

MOKURIA: Yeah.

SOLIS: Even though they never had a chance to know each other. That just caught my attention. I know that you mentioned it because I think it's something that you're thinking about too. Do you care to sort of talk about that and talk about what you think that means?

MOKURIA: Yeah. That's something—I have no idea. I mean my son, I don't know. I think about generational pain and trauma then I also think about—he knows the work that I do. He doesn't know all the depths of how my dad died or was killed but he knows he was killed by police, but he doesn't know graphic details. He knows about Mothers Against Police Brutality and the work that I do. He sees pictures of my dad and his middle name is Tesfaye. So there's that connection.

But when he, it always happens when he's beyond exhausted and he's going to bed and he's crying. At different times like he cried over my mom's dog that died, Chloe. He would say, "I miss Chloe," and he'd cry for Chloe. He cried for his fish that died, "He was my best friend." But then he would cry for my dad and he said, "I just I miss my Papa Tesfaye," and he'd cry. And I was like, the first time that happened I was thinking like, "How can you miss him?" I miss him in knowing him but I think—and what I knew of him.

I knew things to miss, although even now it's harder. I remember his smile from pictures but I don't I remember fully his smell, his hug and all those things but I think my son misses him the way my sister misses him, in a longing for a relationship that was never allowed and I don't even know how to, I can't even give that to him. It's like and that's what bothers me about all of these cases, it's like even if the person was in their darkest moment, if they were having their hardest moment, I look at me in those years of anger and rage that I had.

If somebody had ended my life then, they would have killed all the growth and possibility and goodness and wonderful things that are brought into this world. I feel like when he does that, I think he misses—it's that longing for the what could have been. That's another layer of sadness that I can't even, I don't even know where to hold that in my body. Because he doesn't have a grandfather and he never will because that was taken away from him, and the lessons he could've learned and even who I would have been as a mom would have been different. I try to, we talk about my dad when he wants to know stories and stuff I'll tell him but it's not like—I also sometimes tried to avoid it. It kills me when he has those episodes.

SOLIS: Just to sort of begin to wrap up a little bit, I want to know more about your Mothers Against Police Brutality, how you started to get involved in your activism and advocacy around police violence and then how you came to co—found this pretty amazing group.

MOKURIA: Well, okay so I guess I had always been, not always but for the majority of my life, I was just disoriented just because any type of injustice I just took personally. I learned through, when I went to college, that's one thing I didn't say is two weeks after arriving in New York City, September 11th happened and I saw the second tower fall and New York and the world was changed. My experience in college was also shaped by the anti-war movement and becoming part of that. And so learning resistance besides like pissing teachers off or pissing my family off or being like, "F you!" to the world, I learned about organized resistance. I'm like, "Oh, there's a place for me in this world. I can resist injustices on a broader level." That was like through college and then through graduate school, through working with a bus drivers' union in Boston and through working with labor organizers and also with the Communist Party there.

I learned strategies, organizing strategies and so when I came back to—I had decided in that process that I wanted to be a teacher because I felt it was a concrete form of social justice and because teachers and books had literally saved my life and given me a framework of understanding my life. I wanted to be a high school teacher, a history high school teacher to give that to other students or to young students, so that's what I had decided and so I had come back to Dallas to do that.

That's another long story but in that process, when police would kill, I would try to support families in a nonspecific way, non-organized way but just offer support, emotional support, whatever support they needed and also there was a group of activists that I would work with and we were doing things. We wanted to get a referendum around changing the citizen review board. We were trying to do different policy things but there was tension in our different philosophies and ways of going.

They were all males and so then there was also gender tensions, a lot of infighting and different things that happen sometimes within like a movement culture. When Clinton Allen died or was killed, I always say died and I don't know why I do that instead of saying murdered which is more accurate but when he was killed, a few months after he was killed, a friend of mine, Robert Rooks, reached out to me and said, "Hey, there's a family that—" his friend Gina Paige had reached out to him about and Gina was friends with Shaydrea who was Clinton's sister and he said, "This mom and this daughter are really struggling and having a hard time, will you meet with them and support them?"

I agreed to, so I met with Shaydrea and Collette at—it was an original pancake house but it's a breakfast place that is in the same place over in Oak Cliff. We met that day. I was letting them know what you're feeling is something that a lot of families have felt. It's a marathon, not a sprint and you're not alone. I offered my support, I offered to give help and context around ways to move forward in their case and setbacks other folks have had, different things that have happened with different families and just the different activists and different folks who are working on it so that they didn't—Because they felt really alienated and alone which we all feel when that happens and even from your own family and friends, it's the way it changes people is sad.

So we met in that way. We started talking. We started with a campaign to get Clark Stoller, the officer who killed Clinton off the streets because he was put back on the streets three days later, three or five days later. So, we started hitting the streets with the whole campaign to get Clark Stoller off the streets and we were successful with that. He was put on desk duty and then we pivoted our focus on to Craig Watkins who was the district attorney.

We were pushing in these different ways and we started having meetings and bringing different activists and community folks together. Colette said we need to create an organization that does this work in an organized way nationally to make policy changes on a national level and also to support families in the way we know that they need to be supported but in a systemic way. And so she, I and John Fullinwider. I had met John—so I remember I said I was teaching high school.

So I was teaching high school and my luck was that the superintendent at the time, who is the current superintendent now, announced there was a budget shortage and they started firing teachers, not firing but laying teachers off and so you'd see these news reports with teachers walking out with a box of all their apple and ruler and preschoolers and kindergartners crying like, Ms. So-and-So, don't go. I was just like this young 20-something history teacher who was just full of fire and passion. Like, "Hell no, we're going to fight this." and so I started really resisting going down to every board meeting.

I was outside of their Board President's house and protesting the superintendent. I met John, who was also a high school teacher at that time. We met on the front lines and he's one of my best friends now. He had done a lot of work. He's like the Dallas saint. He had done a lot of work around police accountability in the 80s, so when I met Colette, he was one of the people who I have brought in to meet with her. I kept pushing like you got to meet her, you got to meet Colette because, I also when I met her, I knew she was different.

I had met a lot of families like I said, even for our family, a lot of us our activism, our part of the movement is our own personal survival, just surviving but she was different in a way that her fire was like, I just saw her being a national leader and she had this, she was ready to fight beyond her own personal battle and so really it was through her leadership and her dedication that we founded Mothers Against Police Brutality and have been able to change the context in this city.

We have spoken at the UN, we've spoken before international court, all over the nation, to Congress and people don't write us into the story. Dallas will not give us—the Dallas Police Department, the city of Dallas writes us out of the story but I think that's true for—we remember Martin Luther King, Jr. but there is a movement, there were people who created that. I think it's important that we acknowledge and we tell those stories.

I think it was through that—and really the gift that Colette has given me is, I was still, at that time when I met her—this is 2013—I was telling my story but not out there. I would talk to a family and I would help organize protest but I would always, I would never get

in front of the camera. I never wanted people to know what I was doing or how I was doing it. I would always just be behind-the-scenes.

I was always behind-the-scenes and still scared to really, I say scared, I don't know if that's the right word. I don't know if scared is the right word. I still wasn't ready to lead with my story. I was fighting against it, but behind-the-scenes. She inspired me to lead with my story and really with Mothers Against Police Brutality, we believe those that are closest to the problem are closest to the solution and sharing our stories helps illuminate the changes that we need. She gave me—I thought I was helping her. I was asked to support her and her family, which I did.

We spent so many hours on the phone and crying and talking, fighting and doing all those things. I thought I was helping her and she was also helping me come out and recognize I could share my own story too and that I didn't need to—I think I still felt on the professional side well if I really get out there and start sharing my story and I'm open, people use it against me. But then the freedom of living truthfully and authentically and not doing things in the shadows was worth more than anything I could lose from doing this kind of work.

SOLIS: Is there anything that, thank you, first of all, for that. Is there anything that I didn't ask that you want to share or, as you know, your interview first will be added to a public archive, will be made accessible publicly and then will be available for you to use however you want, but is there anything that you feel like the public just needs to know whether it's about you, your family or your work that we didn't get into yet. I feel like we covered a lot.

MOKURIA: We did cover a lot. Well, I would say one of the things is we can change this. I feel like I don't even know if I was able—like if what I said and how I said it was in a way that can really help people understand the level, the depth of the pain and trauma that this causes—I would just say little things you never think about, but every romantic relationship I have ever had has been impacted by that experience, every relationship, every friendship, every professional relationship has been impacted because it has shaped me, it has changed me cellularly.

I have PTSD, like a lot of people think it's funny, but I'm easily shocked like fireworks trigger me. Doors opening and closing, people moving fast. There are little quirks but those are all remnants of what I've experienced and even I can open the front door and know, okay somebody rang the doorbell, somebody's at the front door and still be like startled—to also like how I process emotions, my memory. I have black holes in my memory.

It's very hard for me to remember things and I know a lot of other families talk about that similar experience. So, there are all these physical things that happened as well and actually, I guess it was two years ago now, in the midst of there were multiple shootings and our work was really intense. My brain bled. We always—like I had gone and testified in DC and I couldn't see and my face was numb.

My brain was actively bleeding and then came back and went to the hospital and realized that. But it's like the way it impacts our physical bodies, it kills so much more than a person. Like I said with my dad, it killed a business, it killed the liveliness of other people, it killed all possibilities that he could have brought to this world. It killed who I could have been, who would I have been without trauma. Who would I—I don't know.

I consider myself one of the lucky ones. So many other people, when you look at their families, grandma dies of a heart attack, so-and-so has high blood pressure, so-and-so has cancer. You start seeing all these physical ailments showing up in everybody else's life. With me, it was cutting myself, and trying to commit suicide. It destroys the fabric of a family and also of a community and I would say our broader community. Like I said, I haven't even gotten into the impact on the police officers and their family and their community side. So it's like the destruction is so immense and so intense and we can change it.

We have to have the courage to change it and just like slavery, just like lynching, just like Japanese internment camps, just like the genocide of Native Americans all these different points where this country has made the wrong decision and not done right by people. It still is doing that today, right. We have to have the courage to imagine a different world and to create it. That's what Mothers Against Police Brutality is doing. We are changing policies today. We're advocating to change policies today to save lives and also creating a vision for a future with a radically different type of police force in our country, and it's going to take all of us.

Just as we have learned with HIV and AIDS that when it was a disease that was hurting a vulnerable population, who was not in the center core of society, people didn't care until it came in and it was touching everybody. It always comes in and touches everybody. I think that especially with videos and things like that, today, people recognize that. I think that people don't understand that it's beyond, we have to get out of the thought process that it's just this individual incident between an officer and an individual and recognize the systemic nature and the systematic issue and also that that officer is the front line representative of the state.

Most people don't know: on average, three people are killed by an officer every single day in Dallas, not in Dallas, in the United States. There's a death in custody in Dallas at least one every six weeks. This is a lot of people with stories as painful, if not more than mine. I have been able to work through different odds and am still working through odds to create joy in my life but we shouldn't have to, we shouldn't be put in that position, we shouldn't be putting kids in that position.

That's why we fight and that's what our work is about and people can go on our website mothersagainstopolicebrutality.org and learn about how to get involved and we have a policy plan and agenda. We are rethinking what public safety looks like and that's what our work is about. That's what I'm passionate about because I don't want anybody to ever have to experience what I've experienced and to feel what I've felt and to go through what our family has had to go through.

I guess that's what I would say is I was just a meeting with, when I was in Chicago, with Rekia Boyd's brother, Martinez, who—so much of what he was saying about the depression that he's been going through. Every family, it's the same thing over and over again. Some people make it and some people don't. I mean as family members, some people can push through their depression and their pain and some people can't. It kills and I just, I don't want to live in that kind of society. I don't think anybody else really does either. I think and I believe we can do better. That's why I am fighting to make a change.

SOLIS: Thank you so much, Sara.

MOKURIA: Yeah, thank you.

SOLIS: Really appreciate it. I've really enjoyed talking with you and meeting you.

MOKURIA: Yeah, thank you all for making the trip and being accommodating and all of that.

SOLIS: That's the least we can do. These interviews always teach me so much, but I hope that we can continue to talk and figure out ways that we can work together.

MOKURIA: Yeah, absolutely and I'm happy to connect with other people. I mean I don't even know what else to share or not share. I always—

SOLIS: This was perfect. Like I said, I just hope it's the beginning of—we are able to support each other's work.

MOKURIA: Yeah, absolutely.

SOLIS: Thank you so much.

MOKURIA: All right, thank you.

SOLIS: Appreciate it.

MOKURIA: Thank you.