

TAVP Visions After Violence Interview
Interview with Hayley Pokorski

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Summary:

In this interview, Hayley Pokorski discusses both her family's and her own relationship with mass incarceration and state violence through exploring her personal lived experiences and sharing her exposure to state-induced trauma caused by incarceration through familial encounters.

MARCI MARIE SIMMONS: My name is Marci Marie Simmons. I'm with the Texas After Violence Project. I'm here talking with Hayley Pokorski. It is April 17th at 12:11 p.m. Thank you Hayley, for offering to tell your story for the archive and for research and all of the good things. We appreciate you so very much.

HAYLEY POKORSKI: You're welcome.

SIMMONS: So Hayley, I'm interviewing several members from your family and we're talking about mass incarceration and victims of state violence because of mass incarceration and how that relates to you. So where do you think your story starts, maybe, as it pertains to mass incarceration in this country?

POKORSKI: Um, probably, when I was like real young, I don't even remember what age I was, but I remember seeing my mom in Dallas County Jail. Like I would go up there, and we would see her and, um, one year she didn't come home for Christmas and my dad, Donnie, he came and celebrated Christmas for us – with us, because we were under the impression that we were not going to have a Christmas, like our great-grandparents told us we weren't going to get nothing. We woke up to the whole living room flowing out into the kitchen and stuff full of presents and my mom wasn't there. And you know – having memories like that are not good memories. They're not memories you want to have. And, um, it sucked because, you know, she wasn't there. That was our first Christmas without our mom, and we didn't have our dad there – our real dad. So yeah, that was hard.

SIMMONS: When you visited your mom in Dallas County Jail, how was that? For someone that maybe has never been to a county jail visit, can you describe it? And how it was, did you get to touch her? That kind of thing.

POKORSKI: Oh, no, we didn't get to touch her. We went through, we went down these long hallways all the way to the back of the jail, and it's a big

jail, and you go through these metal detectors, you know, you get pat down, they check your shoes. Not just that, but like you could go through, not just one metal detector, you go through like three or four. And then you got to go through all these double doors and they like – they have to open them for you and they have to lock them after you walk in. Just knowing that like, once you're in there, you're in there. You can't get out until they're ready to let you out. And as a little girl, that's scary, like, you don't get to touch her. We got to talk to her on the phone that barely worked. It's nasty because, you know, they don't go and clean that visitation area. So, I mean, it was just, it was disgusting and it was just like, terrifying, hearing them doors lock. That's what stays with you the whole time.

SIMMONS: Who brought you to visit your mom and who was with y'all?

POKORSKI: It was me and my grandmother. And then I want to say both my brothers, but it could have been all three of us, both my brothers and my sister.

SIMMONS: So, your mom didn't come home that Christmas. Did they give you an explanation of where she was? Did they tell you what was going on with her?

POKORSKI: Yeah, my great-grandparents and my grandparents always told us, like, when my mom was in jail like that she was in jail. It's not like she was on vacation or anything like that, so we knew she was in jail. We didn't know what was going on with her cases at the time, but we knew where she was. And no, there was really no explanation besides the fact that she was in jail.

SIMMONS: Were you in school yet?

POKORSKI: I think so. I want to say I was because my stepdad,

Donnie, he came into our lives like right – I want to say I was in like first or second grade. I'm 25 now, so.

SIMMONS: How long was your mom gone for?

POKORSKI: I don't really remember correctly. I know that she was gone for, I want to say – maybe a year. Maybe, maybe give or take, not too sure. Because I know she got sentenced to five years, but before that she was in and out of jail on probation violations and catching new charges and being out on bond and all that stuff. So, I'm not too sure.

SIMMONS: Who took care of you when your mom was going through the legal system?

POKORSKI: My great-grandparents and then, um, my grandma, too. But we were living with my great-grandparents, but my grandma was there all the time.

SIMMONS: How was that?

POKORSKI: It was fun. I mean, I love my great-grandparents. My grandma – I didn't understand why my grandma wasn't the one taking care of us, why my great-grandparents were because they were older. And I never really asked that question and I really never even thought about that until just now. Literally as I'm talking to you, I just realized, like why wasn't she there – like my grandma? She's, you know, younger and my great-grandparents, they're sick. So, I didn't understand that, but yeah.

SIMMONS: Did you and your siblings get to stay together during that time? You guys were all there together?

POKORSKI: Sometimes we was until CPS stepped in. Once CPS stepped in from my mom being in jail and my, you know, my real dad not being around and stuff like that. And my great-grandparents taking care of us and they were elderly. So, we had a whole bunch of CPS cases and we were in the foster system. And then once we left the foster system, both my brothers went with my grandmother and me and my sister went to my aunt and uncle.

SIMMONS: How was that? How did that feel being separated from your brothers?

POKORSKI: Oh, we lost a lot of time because we were separated, not just for like a couple weeks or whatever, we were separated for years. Even though they live right down the street, we didn't live with them. You know what I mean? We didn't go stay the night with them. I mean occasionally, you might get us where we're like together late at night, but we never really stayed the night with one another while my brothers were at my grandma's and me and my sister was at my aunt's. And then, you know, my sister ended up leaving me at my aunt's and going on to my aunt and uncle's out in Joshua. But, that was hard.

SIMMONS: Do you remember how old you were when that happened?

POKORSKI: I want to say I was almost a teenager then – because I was with my aunt and uncle until I was fifteen, so probably – not fifteen, thirteen. So, I was probably like nine, eight. Give or take. Something like that, yeah.

SIMMONS: So, some of your siblings – all of your siblings – have had felony convictions. They've all been victimized by the state in the form of mass incarceration. Can you tell me about the first arrest? The first time that you saw one of your

siblings or knew that they were arrested?

POKORSKI: It was my sister. I knew she got arrested. I was about fifteen at the time and I knew she got arrested for possession or whatever and um – we got her out on bond not long after she went to jail, so it really didn't hit me that she went to jail because she was right back out. And I didn't really pay attention to how serious charges are until all three of my siblings started getting charges after charges, after charges. So then I didn't realize at the time that my sister got arrested how bad her charges were, and that they were felonies. I didn't really know the difference between felonies and misdemeanors, because misdemeanors, you get out. She got out too, so I wasn't thinking a bond.

SIMMONS: That's a lot for a fifteen-year-old to process everything, how the system works. Well, let's talk about when one of your siblings actually was incarcerated. Can you walk me through some of that?

POKORSKI: I want to say – I don't know who went to prison first, whether it was my sister or my brother. I want to say my sister, though. When she actually went to TDC, and not state jail, because at the time I guess they were two different jails or whatever. So, my sister, when she went to TDC, the first real memory that I have is I went to go visit her, on her, I want to say her 21th birthday or her 20th birthday, or something like that. And we went to the vending machine – she told me what to get from the vending machine, and it was like a honey bun and some other cakes and like a whole bunch of chocolates and Skittles and stuff. And when I got back to the table, we were sitting outside, and she showed me how to make, I guess, a little homemade prison cake – birthday cake with honey buns and all that stuff. And then she showed me how some girls do makeup in there by like, the Skittles with the water or a colored pencil with a little bit of water to do eyeliner, stuff like that. So, I remember we doing a birthday cake for her, and I remember her doing my little makeup. It was so cute.

SIMMONS: How was that? Who was with you at that visit?

And can you talk about the process of what going in to visit? How that felt and what you went through to get there, and then follow up with how it was leaving your sister behind.

POKORSKI: I don't know exactly how long it took us to get there. I don't remember what unit my sister was at, and I don't really remember how long it took us to go out there. But I was with my mom and my grandma, and once we got there, it was a pretty easy process to go through. I mean, we had to take our shoes off and stuff like that, but I mean, we went through one door and then as soon as we walked out, we went to visitation area, and they asked us if we wanted to be outside or inside. And we said outside, and then my sister was sitting there waiting, and she was like the brightest one in the room. Her whites were white, I mean, they were white. I don't know – they were tan, she had tan ones at the time, I think. Yeah, because she was like, You see? I don't have no stains on my outfit. That's what she told me. And I was like, Yeah, I know you stand out. Like, you're the only one that stands out. Everybody else has like holes or something in their shirt or like a big stain or, you know – you could just tell that they've been used. And once we got there, it was easy, it was real easy. Like, we didn't have a guard down our back at the time, well granted this was like ten years ago. So, times are different now.

But yeah, and it was so sad leaving her, like, I cried. I was like, Why can't she come with us? Like why can't we just take her? And then she was telling us, like while we were at the station, that when she leaves to go back, she's gonna have to get undressed, strip-searched, and I'm just like, Why do people want to look at other people, you know, like their bodies like that? You know, my mom and them always taught me that your areas are your private areas. So, like that's violation. I can only imagine her feeling so violated having to get undressed in front of these people that she doesn't even know. So, that was the only thing that I kept going through my mind. As I'm leaving, I'm crying, so I'm like – she's gonna go back there and they're just gonna mess with her and they're just going to make her feel like this and feel like that and just like, Why can't we just take her home?

SIMMONS:

Let's talk about visiting your brother some.

When did they start having trouble with the legal system and start getting arrested?

POKORSKI:

My older brother, he's always in and out, in and out, in and out, in and out. I mean, his record's pretty long, but he mainly had state jail felonies. So, he was – he was there, but he wasn't there long enough. He was only there for like six months, you know what I mean? So, it wasn't as long as, like two years, or three years, that my little brother did, you know? Or six years that my sister recently just did. So the first time, my older brother went to TDC. It was, I want to say, in like 2017, 2018. That was his first time going to TDC, and he got a two-year sentence and he was there the whole two years. And visiting him, there was a point in time where we visited him in a cage, because I guess he was G5 – uh, yeah G5. So, we visited him in the cage and he's walking up in shackles. And they release his hands, but they don't release his feet. And then you don't have a phone to talk to. So we don't have a phone to talk to him. So, we're talking through like this metal thing that has holes in it, and then there's people on the side of us, too, and they're doing the same thing. And then there's people on the side of them doing the same thing. There's people behind us doing the same thing and some of them have kids – little kids. So, it's like hard to hear and talk to him. And then, you know, when we go to the vending machine, it's not like my sister. It's not like where we could take things back to the table and not have to – we can open them up at the table because we're getting them from the vending machine. But when I went to visit my brother the first time he was in TDC, we had to have a guard come with us to the vending machine, get the food from the vending machine after we put in all of these quarters, and we pick our selection and stuff. They pick it up and then they take it back to a desk, open it all up on a plate, and then take it to him. Like, I understand that, you know, security reasons, but I mean that's a little – that's just sad that that's how we got to do things now. When back in the day, we didn't have to do that. When my sister first went to prison, we didn't do that. Now, that's what we do. And then, my brother would be telling me that he don't really get showers every day in, I guess, G5 status. In G5 status, I guess you don't get showers every day like you're supposed to, or

whatever. So he would be like, We shower like maybe once a week. But, it's made him mean. Like it just made him mean and mad.

SIMMONS: Do you think you could tell a difference in your brother before he served that first sentence? And then after he came home?

POKORSKI: Yeah, for sure. Before he went, he had a little common sense, I mean, he did. He had a little common sense to him. And since he came home, he just has that mentality of nobody's about to disrespect him. Like, if you disrespect him, he's gonna act on it, and it's like, you know, some things – not every action needs a reaction. And before, he wasn't like that. I mean, if you cuss at him or something he might cuss at you back but he's not going to just come up swinging. And now he would just – he's going to get his respect somehow. You know what I mean? He's just – I mean, he even still eats bread when he comes home. Like you're not, you're not an inmate, you know what I mean? And then one time, I caught him walking with his hands behind his back and I'm like, what are you doing? He'd be like, This is how we walk in prison. I'm just like, But you're not in prison. You're not in a prison. You don't have to take five minute showers. You don't have to wear Crocs in the shower sometimes. You know, like, you don't have to do that. You're not there no more. You're home. But, he does it sometimes, and I don't understand why.

SIMMONS: Who was with you visiting your brother, like who was the most person that would take you to visits? Are your siblings not at those visits?

POKORSKI: No, because one of them is always either incarcerated, or on probation, or just not able to come because of choices that they were making at the time. But, my grandma – my grandma took us to a couple. But it was mainly my mom and then my sister's best friend, Ashley. She was there at the beginning of it, but I only went with them maybe seven, eight, nine times. And then I would just go with my mom. And then, if it wasn't my mom, I would go by myself.

SIMMONS: So, you guys kind of got separated quite a bit as kids. And then, as older children and young adults, the system still kind of kept you separated because if you're on certain paroles, that's hard to go to visit inside prisons, right?

POKORSKI: Even as siblings, like, siblings can't visit other siblings because probation don't improve, our parole don't approve. Because, I guess that's a stipulation on visiting. You have to get the warden's approval in order to visit while on probation or you have to get your probation officer to approve it or – I don't know exactly how it goes, because I've never done that, so. But yeah, siblings can't even visit siblings. I mean, all they can do is write to each other. Which I mean, that's great, but that's just writing.

SIMMONS: How was it visiting your brother? How did it feel to see him in shackles during this visit? And how did it feel not getting to touch him or hug him?

POKORSKI: Seeing them in shackles, that's scary. Like, y'all think he's that aggressive? He's visiting his family. Like, I don't know the reasoning behind them having him in shackles. I mean, I understand that they did whatever they did to get to that custody level or whatever it's called, but he's visiting his family. Like come on now, you got kids, not just me as a teenager, but you got little kids around me that see their loved one – their dad, or their uncle, or whoever it may be – walking up in shackles. That's scary because you can hear them – you can hear them, and you can see the way he's walking that he has something connecting his feet. And then, you got a whole chain that's coming up to his arms and I'm just like – he kind of looks like, you know, like a dog on a leash, really. Because I mean, they're carrying him, like he's following them, and he can't really walk fast, and it just looks uncomfortable.

And then, not touching him. That was hard. It was hard, but we were kind of used to it at

that point because in county jails you don't get contact visits anyways. So for somebody like me, I go to county jails more than I go to prisons. So, I'm kind of used to having the no contact. But yeah, it's hard from going to have a contact visit to – when you get there, you find out that you can't have a contact visit because he's G5. I thought we would have a contact visit no matter what status he was. I mean we're siblings, like this is his mother. Why can't we have contact? We're not friends, we're not – that's not my cousin. That's my blood brother. This is his mother, his biological mother. Like, why do we gotta talk to him through a glass – or not a glass, but like, a metal thing with holes in it. I don't even know what it's called.

SIMMONS: How was it watching your mom handle her children being incarcerated? Does any story stand out to you? Or just how was it watching her and how was her mental health through all of that?

POKORSKI: There would be times we would leave, and I would be crying, so I used to think like, she'll see me crying that it'll make her cry. But, I mean, I've seen her cry a couple times having to leave my sister because, you know, my sister was the longest – was gone for six years, or five years. That was a long time, like nobody else in my family has been gone that long besides my grandpa. So, you know, going to see my sister on her birthdays, or holidays, or whatever, it was hard seeing her cry because we can't take my sister home or maybe because my sister would just be ready to come home. Like, she'd be going through things in prison and we didn't – I didn't understand. So, like my sister's telling me things, and my mom can connect with her because my mom has been there. And so, just seeing her cry because she knows how things are in there, because she's been there, and knowing that her daughter's going through it, that's hard. But majority of the time, my mom, she was always the strong one. Like she didn't really – if it bothered her, if it hurt her, she's not really trying to let it be known or let it show. Now, she does, but back then she didn't. She didn't do that for a couple of years. She would hide it. I mean there were a couple of times, maybe a handful of times, I've seen her break down when we were leaving. She was really

good at keeping – trying to get me to stop crying. It's okay. She's gonna be home. They can't hold her forever. Well, no, they can. Because it feels like forever now. Like, it's forever. I don't even know when she's gonna come home.

SIMMONS: How was home life with your sister gone? How was that at home? What was the routine? What had changed?

POKORSKI: Nothing really because, before I left my aunt and uncle's, my sister done moved out. Like, she left us living together when I was living in my aunt and uncle's before I went back to my mom's – before she started going to prison and stuff – she left before then. So, it really wasn't too much different because when she did come back to Dallas or whatever, she had her own apartment or she was living with somebody. So, she never really came back home once she left. So, it wasn't really too much different. It was just hard that she used to live in the same apartments as us, so I could just walk out my door and go to her apartment any time because she lived right there by the pool. And so, that was hard because I didn't have nowhere else to go. Like when me and my parents get into it, I would always go to my sister's house. So when she was gone, that was gone. And um – yeah, other than that, it wasn't really too much different because, like I said, she moved out before she started going to prison.

SIMMONS: You mentioned your grandpa. So, is that your mom's dad?

POKORSKI: Yes.

SIMMONS: So, tell me about him. He had been previously incarcerated?

POKORSKI: Yes, I want to say he did eight years or something

like that. I'm not too sure because I was really young. I was really, really young. Like, I don't remember nothing about him besides that, my aunt and uncle – after we were in CPS's care and everything, that my aunt and uncle took me to go visit my grandpa in prison. And that's the first memory I have of him. I don't have any other memory besides that and I don't remember too much of what they said happened. But as I got older, I guess it was a DWI that he got, I guess, eight years for, or something like that, that he did flat. He did his whole time. But yeah, once he got out of prison, it was weird. It was like, really weird because I didn't even know who this dude was. Like, I've only had one memory of him, and that's visiting him in prison, and then he gets out of prison. And I'm like, he's staying at my aunt and uncle's with us. And I'm just like who – I don't know who he is. Y'all keep telling me that's my dad and my aunt's dad – I mean, my mom and my uncle's dad – but I don't know him. Like I know my grandma, but I don't know my grandpa. So, it was really awkward.

SIMMONS: Was that the only time that he was incarcerated since that you can remember?

POKORSKI: No, he's incarcerated now. He made parole, and he'll be out in two months, I believe. He just got incarcerated in 2021, I believe at the end of 2021. And he got two years, I think. Two years, yeah.

SIMMONS: Have you guys been able to be in contact with him at all? Letters or anything like that?

POKORSKI: My mom writes him letters, and he talks to my uncle, I think. Because he's going to my uncle's house when he gets out, but I haven't. I want to set up the phone for him, but I figured he's going to be out anyways, and he probably don't know how to use the phone in there because he's so old-fashioned. But, my mom talks to him.

SIMMONS: Let's talk about setting up the phone. Tell me

about how that process is and getting phone calls from your family in prison. And are you able to talk freely?

POKORSKI: Well, when my mom was in prison, we received a phone call from her. And I remember, I answered the phone – I was at my grandma's – and I answered the phone, and they asked all these questions. And I don't remember the questions at the time, but I remember pressing one and I didn't know that, at the time, that it was going to bill my grandma's bill because it was her house phone. And so when I, I guess, accepted charges or whatever – it had billed my grandma like 30 bucks for that phone call, and I remember I got in trouble for it.

But now, since they changed the rules and stuff for phones and stuff, now that I set up the phone, it is difficult. It's a difficult process. And you have to go and show that, that line belongs to you, and it has to have your name on it and, like, for somebody like me, I'm under my dad's account. There's multiple lines under one person's account. So in order to do that, I have to go through the process of changing everything on the phone bill to my name. So I can get screenshots and having to change it all the way back to my dad's name. It's just difficult and it's just a long process, and then you have to, you know, wait to get approved or whatever. And it's just difficult. It's difficult. But, it's definitely worth it that they could find an easier way to set it up than that, but—

SIMMONS: You have three siblings and are any of them incarcerated right now?

POKORSKI: Yes, my older brother is. He has a five-year sentence, and I think he's only a year into his sentence, maybe almost two.

SIMMONS: So, earlier in our conversation you talked about Christmas without your mom. So, let's talk about Christmases. Let's talk about the first

Christmas after your sister was home. Let's talk about that Christmas. How was that? She was gone for five years.

POKORSKI: That was a great Christmas. We had a good Christmas. You know, everybody kept asking me what I wanted for Christmas, and I was like, I just want my sister to have a good Christmas. That's all I want. I want my sister to have a good Christmas. I just want to make sure she has whatever she wants. I want her to have the most presents under the tree. Like, I just want her to have a good Christmas. And, surprisingly, we woke up – I wasn't living there, I was living out of town. So, I came back, two days before Christmas, and I was staying at my mom's house and I didn't even know this, but when I woke up on Christmas morning, there was so many presents. There was presents everywhere, literally everywhere. And the majority of them were my sisters, but it was a great Christmas. It was a great Christmas. I think we all got along that Christmas. Which is, if you know my family, then you know, we don't get along anytime, so we got along very well at Christmas. My sister, she was decorating all for Christmas. I mean, she was doing the whole – everything you can think of. Baking cookies for Santa Claus, trying to make little Santa Claus prints out of like – what is it, powdered sugar? You know, like just going all out for Christmas. I think she was more interested in Christmas than any other holiday when she got out. I mean, she was going Christmas shopping as soon as she got out. Because she got a job within – she got a job, a car, and an apartment within three months of being out of prison. And once she moved into her own apartment, it was, it was game on. She was buying everybody presents and she was just, I mean, she was just doing, I guess, what she couldn't do in there.

SIMMONS: Were all your siblings there for that Christmas?

POKORSKI: No, I was the only one. No, my brother was. My brother was. Yes, CJ was. CJ was, I believe.

SIMMONS: So, three of you. And where was the other sibling?

POKORSKI: He was in prison. He was in TDC.

SIMMONS: I have personal knowledge of your family. So, I know that your mom does something regarding Christmas presents when her kids are locked up. Can you tell me about that?

POKORSKI: She still buys Christmas presents for everyone and she just puts them up. Like, she does that for birthdays, too. She'll buy them and then she'll put them up. But she makes sure that we all get something from all of our siblings. Like, Dustin, my little brother, wasn't there for that Christmas. So, she made sure we all got a present from Dustin. And, you know, she'll ask Dustin what he wants to get us and she'll get us what he wants to get us. Then, you know, she'll buy presents for him and put them up. Like when he came home, he had three years worth of birthday presents and Christmas presents. And his birthday is right there next to Christmas, so he got out right before his birthday, so he had like, really four years worth of stuff to open. So, yeah.

SIMMONS: So, tell me about the next Christmas, the second Christmas after your sister was home. Who's there? Who's at that Christmas? Are both your brothers there?

POKORSKI: No, it was just CJ. Yeah, Dustin, I don't think was there. You were there for that Christmas, right?

SIMMONS: Mm-hmm.

POKORSKI: I was about to say, I think you were there. I think it was our first Christmas together. Yeah, no, I don't think Dustin was there. But CJ – I think CJ was.

SIMMONS: Can you remember the last time that all four of y'all were there for Christmas?

POKORSKI: I can't remember the last time all four of us were in the same room together, let alone Christmas. I don't remember when we – all four – were together at one time. At all.

SIMMONS: When I go in your mom's apartment sometimes, and I'm looking at the pictures, I'll see how when she has a family photo, and it's like the majority of you, she'll cross another picture and add and make—

POKORSKI: Yeah, she does that. There's a lot of them where it's just like us three – it's just me, my older brother, my older sister – and she kind of has my brother like faded in the background to where you could tell that he was added to the photo, but she tries to make it look like she's a professional photoshopper or something. But she does a good job at it actually. But yeah, that's how it is. Or she'll have a collage and each photo will be just a picture of us by ourselves. There's not – I mean, we have maybe two or three photos of all four of us together. And we were like, really, really, really, really young. So, that's when my sister had long hair and was a girl.

SIMMONS: Hayley, I'm not concerned with charges. We're not concerned with charges. But, I just want to touch on that – you have a stepdad, and so was your real dad ever incarcerated? You say he was gone, so where?

POKORSKI: Yes. He was gone before he went to prison, and he was just in and out, in and out, (of our lives) whenever it was convenient for him. He would come pick us up whenever he wanted to or whenever he was just passing through. But yeah, my dad – the only time I remember my actual biological father being in prison, he was only in

prison one time and he was in there for ten years.

SIMMONS: Do you think that, both of your parents having been in the system, played a factor in your siblings' legal problems? Do you think that that's connected?

POKORSKI: For sure, because, I mean, it – it made them have a connection with my mom that no parent and children should really have. Like, you shouldn't share that as a common, what is it – not interest – but, it's not something that you, as a mother, would want to see your children go through. Or as a child, see your mother go through and know how it is. So, with my parents being incarcerated, I think it made my siblings angry and mad and just not care about the system. Like, oh, you're hurting our parents, so we just don't care. I think seeing them in jail made my brothers even more angry than my sister because you took our mother away. And it's not like we had normal – like in CPS, where your mom brings you food. We can't even bring her food. We can't even have a normal visit with my mother or a normal conversation because you got a time limit. You only got 20 minutes or you only got two hours. And then, that two hours, it doesn't matter if you got to go up and use the restroom, or something happens, or you might be gone for like ten, fifteen or whatever. You don't get that time back, and that ten, fifteen minutes makes a big difference, like going to the vending machine and stuff. Like, she can't go up there with us or he can't go up there with us. He has to tell us what he wants from the table. So, with seeing that that's how my mom and them was, I think my brothers and them just said fuck the system and you can't just say that. I mean, you can't.

SIMMONS: You mentioned that there's maybe a connection or maybe your sister and your mom or your brothers and your mom kind of can relate to each other because they have that common thread. Tell me how that feels. How does that work for you, like where do you fit into that picture?

POKORSKI:

I've never been to prison. I don't do jail because I've seen my siblings and them go through it and I think that the way that they get treated is unfair. And I think some of the rules are very unfair. So, I don't ever want to be in that position, to where I have to follow those rules, or that I can't be here for my mom's birthday, or something like that. Because you don't get time back. Once that time is gone, it's gone. So, I don't know, I've never been through the system. So, I don't know. I don't know how it feels to be on that end. I don't know how – I don't know how it is. I don't know how the system works in there because I've never been there. So, it makes me feel sad for them, because I'm okay with not having that common interest with her or with them. I'm okay with that. I mean, I wish it was never something that would even be part of my story, if it was to be a part of my story. Like, I don't want it to be a part of their story. But yeah, I just feel super bad for them because – I do something like what you kind of do, but I look more into charges and stuff. So, the system is just unfair. It's just unfair. It's not a good connection to have with your family or friends or anything like that. It's not something that you want. So, for them to have that common interest. It's just sad. It's just sad.

SIMMONS: What do you think that the thing is, if your parents' incarceration negatively affected your siblings and kind of put them on that same path, what's different for you? What do you think is different for you?

POKORSKI:

One of us – if not all of us – one of us has to be out here because my mom's not in prison anymore. She hasn't been imprisoned in a very long time. And, all four of us haven't been out together in a very long time. So, one of us is always in jail. At one point, all three of them were in jail, so I had to be the one to be out here for my mom. And, I'm not about that life like them really. I'm not. I'm the baby. I'm the girly-girl, like I get spoiled. I'm the spoiled one out of all of us, I guess. So, I got to – if not all of us, then somebody has to be out here for her because her health, I don't know, it's not that great. My stepdad's isn't either. My grandma's getting older, I mean. It's just, not a matter of time, but it's coming. It's

going to be here eventually. It's not like – they're not getting younger, they're only getting older. And so, one of us got to be out here, one of us, if not all of us.

SIMMONS: Were you ever with your mom or whomever picked up any of your siblings from prison? Can you tell me about that? Do you remember any of those times?

POKORSKI: I remember picking up, I want to say – I didn't go pick up my sister, I don't think. I think I only picked up my little brother one time. I can't really remember any other times that we picked up anybody or that if I went with them to pick up my siblings. I know I went with my friend, Ashley, or my sister's best friend, Ashley, to pick up her ex-boyfriend one time. And then I picked up my ex-boyfriend one time, and I think I picked up my brother one time. I think that's about it.

SIMMONS: Paint the scene for me. What are the emotions or describe it for someone that has never had contact with the system. What does that look like?

POKORSKI: Picking up somebody?

SIMMONS: Right.

POKORSKI: Okay, first of all, they tell you to be there around either, I think 7 [a.m.] or 9 [a.m.] – I think it's 9 [a.m.]. And we got there early because we were so excited. We were like, Maybe they'll get released early. Then, you see that van coming, the white van, and you know that they're coming to you because, at the unit where you go pick them up, they have a little waiting area that you wait in for them to come or whatever because they bring them to you. You see that white van coming and you're like, Okay, here they are, here they are. No – they're coming to get some clothes. They're coming to get his clothes, or whatever.

And that's how you know they're about to come out. So like, you just get excited. I stand out the car. I'll walk around the car a couple times. I'm sitting there and I keep looking and oh, yeah. No, I'm watching – I'm watching, I'm excited. I'm geeked up. I'll be geeked up. I'd be so excited. Like, I'll be hungry right before I get there, and I'm like, okay, I know they're going to be hungry once they get out. They're gonna want some food. No, no. You're going to be so excited that you're not going to want to eat. I don't think I ate until I got home and that was a couple hours of driving before we got home. So yeah, it's exciting to pick them up.

SIMMONS: You mentioned that you feel like the system caused your siblings to have some anger. Do you have any memories related to that that maybe made you think that they were angry? Just angry period, right?

POKORSKI: Yeah. I mean, they would tell me stories about how they seen other inmates get into it, or how one inmate would be acting like they just own the area or whatever, or people stealing from them and stuff. It makes – I don't know. They think that everybody's stealing from them. Or like, they got to keep their stuff in one little box, or one little drawer or something, and they got to take that drawer with them everywhere they go. Just that – I mean you could just tell that they're angry. Because that's how they were living, so I guess that's all that they are used to when they first get out. Every little thing makes them mad. Like, things don't go their way or if somebody talks to them some type of way or someone comes at them sideways or whatever, they just pop off. Just, I don't know. They get angry quick.

SIMMONS: Hayley, is there anything that you thought about telling me when we talked about scheduling the interview that we didn't talk about or anything else that you want to share?

POKORSKI: No, not really. I mean, I'm glad that you're doing something like this because they definitely need a voice from in there, because they don't get

heard. They do not get heard. I don't care what anybody says. They don't get heard. The inmates in there that write the judges and stuff, the judges – I mean, they read them, but they don't care. They don't care. Most of them have never probably been through the system or have family that's been through the system. So, they don't care. And they need a voice like, y'all – like you and your group. It's great, what y'all are doing because they need it. And I hope one day the system will be fixed but, it probably won't. But hopefully all we could do is just make it better, or at least try to make it better.

SIMMONS: So then, just one last question. If you could think of a time before your siblings started getting in legal trouble, when you guys were younger – and it's not that you had an easy life, it was just different, right? Because they weren't getting arrested and going to prison and then jails. If you could go back to those four kids, the four of you – if you, yourself, now, today, could go back and tell something to you and Dustin and CJ and Brittany, to your younger selves, what would you want them to know?

POKORSKI: It's okay. We can be different. It's okay we don't have to do what we know. We don't have to do what we saw. Like, it's okay. We don't have to do that. We don't have to be angry. We don't have to be lashing out. We don't have to have our get-backs, like we don't have to do that. We can be different. We don't have to be like the people that we see growing up and the people we know growing up, like hearing about stories and stuff from other friends and their parents in prison. Like, it's okay. We don't have to be them people. We don't have to do it. We don't have to be another statistic for jails or for prison or for anything law enforcement, criminal justice, anything – we don't have to be a part of that. It's okay for us to be different. And um, yeah, that's what I would tell them. That it's okay for us to be different.

SIMMONS: Thank you so much, Hayley, for giving us a little bit of insight into your life, and I appreciate you so very much. I'm going to turn the recording off now.