

**Texas After Violence Project, Visions After Violence**  
**Interview with Shuntay Weston**

Interviewer: Alexa Garza

Narrator: Shuntay Weston

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Summary: Alexa Garza interviews Shuntay Weston. Shuntay was incarcerated for 15 years and she discusses her experiences during that time. She talks about her release and the sense of disbelief she felt as she left prison due to the many set offs she experienced. Shuntay also talks about reentry, her employment, and regaining her autonomy. Shuntay also talks about how prison impacted her as a person, and correlates her ability to adjust to change due to the uncertainty she always faced in prison. Alexa and Shuntay discuss how their incarceration shaped their outlook on life while remembering the support they offered to each other in prison.

ALEXA GARZA: I want to say thank you so much for taking the time. I know that you were working and it's just been busy, but I appreciate it so much for you to take the time to meet with me. You are great. You look awesome and beautiful. You look beautiful.

SHUNTAY WESTON: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And I just spruced up a little bit. My name is Shuntay Weston, and I actually did 15 years and 11 months incarcerated; one month shy of 16 years. I did just get off work. I actually took off early because I wanted to make sure my hair was right. (Weston laughs)

But those 16 years, I haven't stopped talking about them since I've been home because I feel like sometimes I want to forget it because this is crazy, but I don't ever want to suffer from Alzheimer's or something, and that's the only thing that I remember so I really try to blot it out of my mind — what I've been through. But then again, I try not to because those were life lessons and I realize how strong I am.

When COVID and the pandemic first hit, I seen everybody struggling, but we know how to survive without toilet paper, right? We know that we're going to get it from somewhere. Even if we had to go into an establishment to get their tissue, (Weston laughs) we're going to have tissue. Then, when everybody was freaking out about tissue, we didn't freak out. We had tissue. Just based on the way we used to shop being incarcerated, it taught me how to shop better out here and to always stay one step ahead of the game because you never know what's going to happen.

GARZA: I feel you... You're 100%, right. A lot of people who haven't been where we were (don't) understand that. We're going to go ahead and buy an extra pack of toilet paper because and you're like, Well, we have two. But we're going to have one more, you know, because we always have to have like two in the back in the box and stuff. That's great.

We were talking before this about looking back on... you, who did 16 years, and I did 19. And looking back, I do not know how we did it.

WESTON: I know how we did it. We only did it with the strength of God because you know, when you first get incarcerated, it's almost like a death. When somebody dies, that person don't know that they're dead, only the people around them. So when we first get incarcerated, we pretty much have to turn a blind eye to our families, our friends, and what's going on in the world, because we have to adjust to the new world. And because if you focus on your family, what's going on out there, your friends that you miss so much, it made you do 'hard time'. I mean for me, my experience, it made me do harder time. And I said, you know "I don't know how long I'm going to be here. Parole was like, Oh you're going home, you're going home! And then they snatch the rug from under you, so you couldn't depend on that. So you have to pretty much put everybody out of your mind. You love them. You love letters, you love mail, you love everything that happened. Oh, you know how excited I used to get because my family was out of state. So I used to get super excited. My visits used to drain me because I would be so excited, and I'd hate to see them leave. So.. but you have to put them out of your mind temporarily because if you focus on what was going on out here, your time was so hard and it would bring on a big bad depression and I didn't want to be depressed. We had enough to make

us depressed in there. I didn't want any additives. You know what I mean? So, I couldn't focus on what was going on out here.

GARZA: You know, that's funny that you said that whenever... because I got six setoffs. so for me ...

WESTON: I had eight.

GARZA: So for me, every time that I got a set off it was like the death of a dream, and I had mourning.

WESTON: Yes.

GARZA: And that's the only way that I could describe it. It was like somebody died. And I finally realized that it was my hopes and dreams that were dying, every time that I got set off.

WESTON: Exactly...

GARZA: So I can ...

WESTON: Especially when you know you're doing everything you're supposed to do.

GARZA: Yeah

WESTON: Yeah, but you were perfect. Like me, I was a renegade. (Weston laughs). I didn't get in trouble but I didn't mind getting in trouble and I should have, you know.

But now at 50 years old, I just... I think I wish I would have done some things different, but I'm glad I went through what I went through to build me for who I am now. Because... what my kids see now is a strong woman. My daughter, she goes, Mom, you know what I admire about you? That you can live anywhere and you don't mind. You know, most people are afraid to change. I am afraid of change"

Well, didn't we deal with that a lot? You go to a dorm. You meet people, you're in a good dorm, it's a quiet dorm. You can watch TV dorm. You can actually hear yourself talk on the phone dorm, and then they up and move you. And you just have to move and you have to readjust.

And you have to be comfortable where you were because it wasn't no, Oh, I don't want to live in this dorm. This is not comfortable for me, my friends aren't here. So I don't mind getting up and moving to another state or another city or a new apartment. That doesn't bother me at all. So little things like that prepped us for life today, where something that would be traumatic for somebody else is not that way for me.

Yum...I actually work for a mental health company, and I'm able to help some of the people without them knowing my story, just by paying attention to the details. You know, people don't realize they have so much choice, and something as simple as a preference. I had one person tell me, I feel bad, but I have a preference but I don't want to sound bad. I said, Hey you have a preference you have a preference. You can't ... don't be mad at you because of something that you like. I said, Listen I like butter. I like butter on my bread, I don't like butter. Yes, oil is butter but I'm not going to dip my bread into some oil...olive oil. I'm not going to do that. That's gross to me. I have a preference and I'm not going to allow somebody to make me feel bad about what I like. Whether you're tall, whether you're short, whether you're African-American, whether you Mexican, whatever the case may be. If you have a preference, you have a preference. It's when you're mean in your preference that makes the difference or not. Trying to push your way onto somebody else, that's what makes the difference. You like garlic bread, I like cheese bread. Let's order both! Your way is not better, my way is not best. We can have both, and we can try each other's.

You know, so I.. and..

She goes, Now that you put it that way! You know what?... So sometimes I think the way I think is based on everything we went through because I was traumatized when I first got locked up. I was 24 years old. I had just had a baby. My baby wasn't even a year old and they sent me to "Hobby" which is a maximum security unit.

GARZA: I heard of "horrible Hobby", right?

WESTON: Hey "Hobby" was gangster. That's the best way I can say it. (Laughs) That is being really real. "Hobby" was like Alcatraz, you know, but I made the best of it. It was almost like God made me like Joseph, you know. He went to the what is it.. he went to the pit, he went to prison, and then he went to the palace. And we're in our palace now, you know that right?

GARZA: Yeah. Yeah. For sure. You bring up a lot of good points. Of like, you learn. yum, I guess to say, like you.. To say, I do have a preference. What is it? Let's just talk about it! Because we weren't able to do that. You know, I was very quiet. You... I admired that you were able to speak and speak up for yourself. I was very quiet. That's how, I know, how I survived how I survived, but everybody was different in and of itself. I always admired that you were able to laugh. You were able to bring joy to where you were and others around you. That's what I admired a lot about you. And, your children are seeing a beautiful, strong woman in front of them. and I mean, I am so grateful that you're doing so well! How long have you been out?

WESTON: In April, it will be 10 years. April will be...and I know that I couldn't survive today. Because, I just could not...Like you said, how did we survive? I couldn't be locked up in a cell today. I could not! Oh girl, the anxiety... (Weston laughs) I just couldn't. This is what I learned while I was there. When I would get overwhelmed, God had already equipped us to go through everything we're going to go through. You're not without tools, you just don't know it and realize it yet. And so once I realized that, I could get through it.

But now I ain't equipped for it no more. No, that is not my forte. I'm older now and I've seen too much. I got too much of this free world residue on me, now.(laughs) I was like, How do people go back? And trust me, people will try to make you get in trouble but I hadn't experienced that, really.

When I first came home, my mom and dad picked me up, and I was so scared, Alex. when I was.. I thought it was a game. I thought they were going to snatch the rug from under me. I thought they had the wrong Shante. All kinds of thoughts went through my mind while I was at reception waiting to leave. And they made me put on these ugly brown clothes, but I was so glad to have those clothes. They were all men clothes, and I realized I wasn't as big as I thought I was.

And my parents.. when I see my parents, my mom jump out of this big ole truck, this SUV and I am thinking — she has a Yukon— and she jumps out and they have all this fruit in a cooler for me. And then...when they pick me up... I was so nervous. I was like watch when I get on this van.. truck, they're going to say it was a mistake and I kept telling my dad, Drive! Drive, drive! (Weston laughs)

So then we end up going to Walmart. I took my clothes off at Walmart and I left them in the dressing room in the trash. I got me nice t-shirts and blue jeans shorts or something that come down past your knees, and some shoes that were comfortable. My kids call them “mom shoes”, but they were comfortable. And then we went to Cheddar's, and I didn't know what to order. I had a choice! I had a choice to what... of what I wanted to eat, and it was honored! I didn't know what to order first! My dad was like, Do you want Coke, tea...? I was like, Give , yum, yum, give me a minute! It's almost like I couldn't read a menu!

Then I saw all these people on a cell phone, and I was like (Weston makes a shocked expression)... and then I saw people talking through headsets, and I thought they were talking to themselves! I just thought it was so weird. Then I saw these kids with phones. (Weston expresses shock) Because you know, because when I left, phones were only for people who had money— cell phones, and they were not little phones like this. So, my first cell phone, it was little and had the buttons on them. My daughter was like, Mom, you're not gonna keep that phone! (Weston laughs)

I'm just thinking, I was such a dinosaur, you know, and I still am to a certain extent. I still haven't learned everything.

GARZA: I loved that you said you had a choice, and it was honored. That's powerful to me, because we do have a choice and it deserves honor. It deserves respect, and it deserves to be heard. Whatever it is, our voice has power. Like I said, that's why I wanted to talk to you about this, and do this because I wanted your voice to be heard and your voice to be honored. It means a lot to me for it (to be heard).

I can totally relate, but you working in that field that you are working, over the phone customer service, is right above your forte because you have that ability to speak to people and relate to them!

WESTON: Right, right? My boss told me one time, he said, You can get away with saying stuff that nobody else can say and people love you for it. He's like, If I said that I'm going to be fired or written up or cussed out! He said, But you have a way of saying things.

I was the only one in my last company, and I wasn't part of the escalation team, that could de-escalate any issue. The managers, they would go Oh, no, don't let Khloe (de-escalate)! And she was part of the de-escalation team, like she was the lead over (the program). But at night, when somebody would get a call they'd say, Oh go get Shuntay! She knows how to resolve that. I'll tell her this is what it's about.

GARZA: No, I can totally see that! You could do that! You would do that! You would be great at that, actually!

WESTON: Yup, I would de-escalate any issue! I don't care what it was! But the field I love now is because we were stigmatized, right? People feel like, Oh she went to prison. It's for something bad! And people don't know that you don't have to go to prison for something bad. You don't know if something was self-defense. You don't know if it was the three strikes, you're out. You don't know if it was just a bad situation. You don't know if you were on probation and you just went because your probation was violated. This is something that has... People don't know. All they see is women in white— Oh they're bad!

And so... that's what they think about mental health, right? They think, Oh people with mental health are crazy. Some people just deal with work stress, some people just have anxiety and depression. People don't know that they go hand in hand. With this, COVID going around like it is, and these kids not being in school, that causes anxiety and depression.

So, I get a lot of calls from a lot of prominent people who just need to move past what they think. They need somebody to wipe their windshield wipers off, I mean their windshields off. And that's what had to happen to us, right? Some officers loved me right, because they didn't look at my white uniform. They didn't look at what I was supposed to be there for. Warden Nance loved me, she used to call me "girly girl", and that's the favor I'm talking about. I was heard... I was heard, and in the process I helped other people be heard. It was my peaks in the valley. It really was.

GARZA: Yeah, I love that you said that because you definitely helped other people be heard. I remember I was very sick one night,

WESTON: Oh yea...

GARZA: And I could not get a response or help because... for whatever reason. But you were able to be heard and speak for me and help me get to medical. If it wasn't for that Shuntay, I would've been in the bed. Like

WESTON: See, I barely remember that! I remember you being sick and I kept checking on you, and you passed out on the floor! And I was like, Oh, no, not my friend! I don't know if it's because my mouth so big or because I raised so much hell, but I remember somebody

telling me... she was like, You're so persistent! I said, well if you want a job done, you're gonna have to give me what I want! (Weston laughs). So I think that I am still like that in a sense.

I had a boss out here who liked me. I was trying to start a little business, and what I would do when I was working at the clinic— I thank God that He taught me humble enough because my daughter was my boss. Jessica was my boss, and I was more proud of her being my boss than being (annoyed that) she got this position. You know, she deserved it and I didn't mind working under her.

Well, in this one position that I had, what was I going to say, working at a clinic, I had no experience, but I somehow managed to get it. It wasn't even just because of Jessica, it was just my personality at the time. I was going to school to be a.. what it is... medical transcriber. I didn't want to do that. I only did that because of my daddy, but that's another story. I wanted to go to hair school, but anyway, I was going to school so I knew a little bit about the medical field. Any yum, what was I getting with this story...(Weston thinks to recall the story)

Oh, so I was working a part-time job because I was trying to get a car. So, I was cleaning restaurants at night, like Outback. And so this guy, Matt, he really liked me. Of course, you know, I'm not very tall, and he showed me what he wanted done and I did it. Alex, if I tell you I used to clean the whole back kitchen, power wash that floor, get all that water up around like grease, pull out the stoves and get all that water up.

And, one night he's like, I want you to train other people. I was like, Sure! Because he has to pay us in cash, so he brings in these big ole, big ole guys, like 6'5 and 6'2, and they're big and buff. And, at this time, I'm like 40, 41 years old. So these guys are younger, and they walked back in the kitchen and say, Oh, we can do this! The floors are greasy to where you can barely walk, it's kind of like sliding to take a step. And yum, (Matt) he's like, I got a lady that's in her 40s that will run circles around you guys. They're like, Oh, let me check it out! So the first night, I show them what I did and within an hour, hour and a half, I was already getting water up off the floor, because I came in early and started sweeping while people were there. So they were still cleaning up the dining room, the bathroom, and the bar. And when they came back they said, How did you get all that water up so fast? I said, I have a system.

So the next night, they were supposed to clean the kitchen and I was supposed to chill and clean the dining room, sweep, mop and little stuff. And they were like, Shuntay, can you come help us? We can't get this water up! And he (Matt) was like, I told yall that she was going to run circles around yall so if she tells you to do something listen, because she has a system.

Because if I had not been incarcerated, working on the floor crew in the education building, and we had to clean up all those classrooms, we had to have a system.

GARZA: That's true. I forgot about that, right?

WESTON: Yep, yep, yep. So, I think everything that I went through, I'm using because remember, before I came home, I was a clerk in the laundry.

GARZA: Yes. Yes, you were!

WESTON: I took BCIS (Business Computer Information System) class, that's what taught me how to type. And all my jobs at home have been customer service jobs. Customer services, and not just little customer service jobs either. I was working for an interlock company where I could dictate whether you go to jail or not. (Weston jokes) Get smart with me if you want to! No, I'm just playing but what my notes say could dictate whether you keep your freedom or not.

GARZA: You excelled in like trying to better yourself with the jobs that you had. You went to BCIS to be a better clerk, and then you got the clerk position. And now it's like, right now, with your customer service jobs and stuff... I think you told me that you were helping others, another one of our friends, to get a position in this field. You're still helping out. You're still helping, your still helping out those that needed the help, so that's still carrying you on it.

WESTON: Is it, it is. And, you know, don't get me wrong. I've run into some hiccups with adjusting to family and family adjusting to me. But if I can make the adjustment that I made... like I said, I was gone for 16 years. I was on "Hobby". I remember the parole lady told my mom, If I had a choice, she would never come home! Or I see people making fun of other people knowing they had a disability.

I've never liked bullies! When I think about my life, I never liked for somebody to pick on other people. And I was not that big myself I'll get beat up for you even! (Weston laughs) Even just going back to earlier childhood...

I think now, what I really think, that I know more about mental health, we should have more programs in and out of prison. Because it's a mental thing... when you get out of her, I mean just like we were forced to go in there and learn their ways, we're pushed (out). They kicked us out right? They were like, Oh we don't want you here no more. Yeah, get out here survive the best way you can, and here goes \$200. And, some people don't have nowhere to go. Some people don't go to a halfway house, you know, and we have to learn how to adjust.

I know that when I first came home I cringed when people would hug me because it felt weird even though that's what I wanted. My aunt and all of them came down, and I was like, Whoa, where are these people coming from? Then I kind of got mad because I was like, Where were y'all at when I was locked up? Now y'all want to come see me? What you want to come see me now for? I ain't get a letter or card! You know.

Then, what was the worst was, my grandmother passed away a year to the day that I came home. She held on all those years, and she died a year to the day I came home. So, when I went to her house, her house seemed really small compared to what I remembered, and it was just weird coming to her house and not seeing her. You know, So, we had to adjust to a lot. We have to adjust, and I think we are the people, and I'm not saying that God doesn't make stronger people in other areas, but man, I think he makes us like the Hulk, I'm telling you! We're women of steel



because we survived. We not only survived it, but we are moving through the mulk and the mire to be successful still.

GARZA:                               You're resonating so much with me because of family expectations. My family had expectations when I got home. Don't look back. Don't talk about it. Don't look about it. Don't think about it. It was like you were never there and you know, I was there for so long. I can't forget turn my back on 19 years of my life.

WESTON:                               Right.

GARZA:                               So I can totally understand, and I... thank you for saying that. Because, so you know, And people touching me, that discomfort was just because we were so used to people not touching us.

WESTON:                               Right, right, right? And I just thought... it's different at a visit... were you are allowed... it was almost conditioned, not realizing it until you came home. You don't realize how conditioned you were. You remember how we used to get the magazines and rub the perfume. I have so much perfume now! (Laughs) Which is the fact that I haven't ... just have it.. like when I .....

I just refuse to stay stuck where I was. I knew this wasn't the end even though it felt like it after the first set off, the second set off, the third set off, the fourth set off. The fourth set off, I believe I was on Hilltop, and I was going to college, and I was working at the Garment Factory and I was trying to get into the PIE program. And you had to have a boss to refer you, and I was really cool with Lieutenant— I think her name but she was .. was Hank, I can't remember. She came to Mountain View, but she was like, I want to use you to train everybody on the floor crew, girl. I knew I had favor with her, and I got that fourth set off and I was like, I'm doing everything I'm supposed to do! Why can't I go home? My kids were growing up and they were going through with my family. I couldn't protect them. I had to ... God .. eat cheese and do what my parents said if I wanted to be able to see my kids. You know, it was just a lot. It was just a lot. And then that last set off, I got I said, You know what? I'm getting the hell off this unit. If I got to be here, I'm gonna try to be comfortable, and that's how I ended up on "Mountain View".

I had an officer throw a can. He was really strict! He was... like it... on Hilltop, they didn't want you to look like anything. Especially.. I am just saying.. African American women... they didn't want us doing anything to beautify ourselves. They just didn't want women to beautify themselves, but on Hilltop it was the worse. And they didn't like for us to get our hair pressed. We couldn't braid each other's hair. Go figure, right? So they had clothes that were stamped "work clothes", "WC", because they didn't want you wearing white clothes. That was weird to me! The state is giving you money, our parents hard earned money, to get us decent clothes, and we can't wear them except for on a visit? So that's fake, right? So yum..

I remember seeing one of my friends, and I was like, Oh my God! when I left from "Hobby" because you know Happy hobby did what they wanted to do. So we had work clothes, we had perms and stuff to make us cute. So when I got to the unit, because I was there for college, I

remember going, Is that you? (Weston makes a shocked facial expression) She said, Oh, Don't worry! You're gonna be looking like this too! I was like, Hell no, I aint. (Weston laughs)

So long story short, this officer did not like to see us in white clothes. He had a problem with it. So, of course, we came from other units, we had our white clothes so we would stash them and put them in other people's lock boxes and things like that. Well, one day, I was at college, and he came into my cubicle and he found my white clothes! I still don't know how he found them to this day because I did everything but damn near tape them to the top of the box. (Weston laughs) And he found them and he wrote me a case. That case stopped me from getting my perm, so I was pissed off. Well, long story short about a year or two later, yea cause I was there about two and half years...I was coming out of the chow hall and he threw his Coke can.

Now he bypassed the trash can to throw this Coke can at my face. It could have hit me. I knew he was playing, but I used that because.. guess what? If I were to throw a Coke can at him I would have been under SEG (segregation/isolations). So I used that to my advantage. I said, I'm afraid of him. Y'all gotta lock me up, if he keeps it up. And I had got my mom to get Campazano because I used to tell my mama if I ever write you in a different color than pen, that means something's wrong, and I wrote her in pencil. She crazy...(Weston laughs) She started calling every official there was, and needless to say they wouldn't put me in SEG. So I started saying, So you're not going to lock me up? I started complaining about the construction on the unit, I was grieving everything. They said you know what, You're gonna get your butt kicked off this unit! (Weston laughs)

I was in the commissary line one day and they were like, Weston! I was like WHAT!. Go pack your sh\*t! I was like, What? They were like, You're going off-unit! This was at like 12 o'clock noon. I was the only one on the bus! (Weston continues laughing) I know how to get somewhere if I need to.

And even now, it's the same way. You're not going to mistreat me because I will move around.

GARZA: It's very interesting to me how you say, you always knew, you told your mom, If I write you in a different ink... Because it's very difficult for us

WESTON: To get help

GARZA: — in general to get any letter out saying, Hey this is what's really going on!

WESTON: Exactly.

GARZA: I know what the policies and procedures say, but we also know the realities of things. You know, so I —

WESTON: People don't really know how bad— We just made the best of it. People don't know how we're on lockdown, and we eat sandwiches all day long and the meat may not be up to par. You better hope you have a friend that got a soup. You better hope you make it to the store before lockdown. That was the worse, that was cruel to me: to pack all of your stuff to the gym so they can tower through it and tear it up. And then, we have to come back to the dorm and we get five minutes to shower after we've been sitting up here for days without showering. That's crazy to me! That was inhumane!

What about when on Hobby when the water went out and the warden goes, It's a stinky situation. We didn't have any water so people were pooping everywhere, all in their clothes and throwing them out the windows in blankets. And they had us locked up in a cell! We couldn't use the bathroom, and then everybody was using all of the same porta-potties, and they weren't dumping them in time. Like, they were not dumping them in time, like they should have been (dumping them) like every hour, but it was more like every six hours. It was horrible. It was horrible. We experienced that on Mountain View remember? It was ridiculous, but because we are this (Weston flexes her arm to signal being strong), and I came from Hobby, I was already built for it, you know.

People don't understand. And that's the one thing that I hope this does: shine a light on whether people deserve to be incarcerated or not. It does not mean that they're not human. Now, I'm not saying that we should be treated and get Jolly Ranchers, but we do deserve to eat fruit. We do deserve to eat healthy. We do deserve to have Christmas the best way we can. We do deserve to be treated like women. We do deserve to be respected.

I know you remember that officer used to call people out their names all the time and cuss them out, and you kind of had to eat cheese because you had to make it to the store because you ain't been in the month. So you dare not talk in that commissary line, not even move your lips while he calls you a crackhead and everything else. Needless to say, I've seen him working at Walmart and I laughed. There's nothing wrong with working at Walmart, but all the crap you talk to us.. but I seen him working at Walmart and I said, Oh, look at karma.

GARZA: Yeah, you know, we yum...that's a great point, Shuntay, that you bring up. Even though it is a punishment for whatever, we are also human in the inhumane conditions of not having water. Like not having water, You are locked in a cell and you do not have access to water to drink, to bathe, to do anything. And you try being locked in a cage for days upon days with no drinking water and defecating in paper bags, or you know, no way to defecate

WESTON: People don't even treat dogs like that. ....No pads, no things that...you know, it was ridiculous. It was ridiculous. And that's one reason I haven't pursued to... writing a book or anything because it's so much hurt, you know.

I remember one time, I was looking over the mountain by my window and I was saying, One day, I'm going to be on the other side of that mountain. It gave me hope. And I don't know if I was depressed or just sad and I just got tired of it all. I remember stretching on my floor, not on my knees. I stretched out on the floor like I was superwoman , and I was just saying, God, how

much longer? What are you preparing me for? I know, it's got to be better than this. It has to be better than this. And then I remember going to Bible study at night and I remember the lady saying, "Shan— Shan... somebody, Shan-tee? I was the only "Shan" anything. She's kept saying, "Shan-tee", "Shan.."... And then the other lady said, Shuntay? And she's like, Yes. God told me he has heard your prayer and oh girl, I could've ran around that church! Because I knew it was true. I knew! How would you know...She said, God told me He has heard your prayer, and I had just prayed that prayer before I went to Bible study that night. I had just prayed it!

I remember one time going to the chow hall and I was just so tired of it all and I just got tired of it all. I just got tired of getting a tray. I got tired of getting up going all the way up to the chow hall to get two corn dogs. (Both women laugh) I was just tired of it, and I sat my tray down and I looked up and I just started crying. And this lady said, Shuntay, what's wrong? I said I'm tired of this! I'm tired of getting a fork, I'm tired of getting a spoon! Look at this! I'm hungry! We don't go to the store for 2 weeks, but what about people who never made it to the store? They don't have a choice, you know!

And that's why I love... We can have sandwich night tonight. The other night was burritos. The other day was cheese dip. You know, I don't take it for granted. I don't. And if I do, Lord, forgive me now, because I don't mean to.

GARZA: It's just different for us. That's why I wanted to talk to you, and share just like this. I remember you and I cleaning the chapel, and we had the praise and worship music so loud. We danced do you remember that,

WESTON: I do now that you brought it up.

GARZA: We dance down the aisle worshipping even though we were there to clean. We were cleaning, we were working, but we also could reflect on the beauty of, and pray, and worship, in that moment of our captivity.

WESTON: RIGHT.

GARZA: And that moment when we were dancing, we were free, and I'll never forget that.

WESTON: See, if something happens to me, I need you to speak at my funeral. I hope nothing happens to me, but I just need you to talk for me. Because people need to know, that even in the midst of it all... it's almost like all the bad things that have happened in the United States, right? Like slavery and all that... That's how we felt. We felt captive, and we felt like we didn't have a choice, but yet, we could still praise God.

You know, and I used to sing. I think you guys made me feel like I was like a mini celebrity. (Weston laughs)

GARZA: You were to us.

WESTON: I came home, and I started auditioning because those were dreams I had. If I never made The Voice, I got the opportunity to experience it. I don't know if you know, but my family and I had to bury my six year old cousin recently from drowning so that was really hard on our family. I was just in the living room and I had my computer. I put on one of the gospel songs that we used to listen to, and I just listened to the music. Because you know we couldn't play music without the words, we had to sing over the words, remember?

But I actually found the music with the instrumental, and I started singing. And my partner came in and said, "You sound amazing!" And she said, I'm going to record you and she's like, I'm gonna record you. And I was like, No, don't record! And it ended up being nice. I sent it to my mom, my daughters, and I sent it to one of our sisters and she said, I've listened to that song three times since you sent it to me, and it wasn't even a whole song!

And I think that's what gave me hope, you know. I knew that it wasn't going to be forever, although it seemed like forever. Because my biggest request was, Lord, don't come back already and I'll be here! At least let me be with my family when you come back, Jesus!

GARZA: We did it. Looking back on it, it was by the grace of God that we were able to be here today. Just like this

WESTON: Right! Right! Because like I said, when I came home, I was 40. I'm 50 now, I just turned 50 two weeks ago and in April, I'll be home 10 flat years, and a lot has happened in 10 years. So the 10 years that we were incarcerated, imagine the world was just passing us by. (Weston makes fast zooming noises)

But I love the fact that we always came together. You remember for Christmas, how the people who went to the store would all contribute and feed the whole dorm. It didn't matter if you went to the store or not. We cooked, and remember that that I made all of those tamales for the whole dorm, and everybody had hot pots. And we were hiding our hotpots because they couldn't stay on. You had the one person watching everybody's hot pots while everybody else went somewhere else because we wanted everybody to have Christmas.

We were a gift to each other.

GARZA: Yeah, we were.

WESTON: It did not matter, At Christmas, it didn't matter if we had beef or if we had argued the day before, or whether you liked me or I liked you, everybody ate for Christmas or any kind of holiday we had.

GARZA: We made sure of it, you're right. We made sure of it. And I appreciate you. And I just thank you for taking the time out.

WESTON: I hope I didn't talk too much!

GARZA: Not at all! After a work day . I just want to thank you. You are amazing. I just thank you very much. And you know, we're definitely going to talk soon. Don't go anywhere, I'm just going to stop the record button, okay?