Gun violence is prevalent in the United States but not in Japan. It’s a difference that is palpable to those who have lived in both cultures and goes far beyond the statistics.

**Content Note**: Discussion of gun violence, domestic violence, and other violence, including personal experiences with it.

**Transcript**

K: So, today’s episode is going to start off a little bit different than our usual episodes, and it’s going to start off with a trigger warning. So, anyone who is sensitive about guns or gun violence, this may be an episode for you to skip. While we’re not going to talk about anything in graphic detail, we will be talking about my history with gun violence, Chad’s experiences with guns, and gun violence in the U.S. as compared to gun violence in Japan. And I just want to be sensitive to everyone who’s been affected or has a strong reaction to the topic and give you the option to click away now. And… I think this is our first trigger warning for an episode.

C: No. I’ve put content notes on other episodes. This is the first one we’ve done audio; that we’ve said. But the… description of the episode always has content notes if we have something sensitive.

K: Yeah, but I think this is probably going to be one of our more heavy and politically charged episodes.

C: I think so. I think this is one of the ones that it’s more obvious that people might have historical issues with it or strong reactions or things like that.

K: Yes. And my experien – my own, personal, experience with gun violence is actually quite harrowing. And, so, warning you: it starts now. So, seriously, if this is something that’s going to be triggering – because I’m not doing this for the purpose of triggering anyone. I’m not doing t his for the purpose to be salacious or be controversial. I’m doing this merely because it’s something that’s been on my mind for… well, for the past – I want to say for the past year.

C: Mhm.

K: Because all of the mass shootings in the U.S. deeply, deeply affect me. And, especially when so many of my communities that I identify and belong to – my ethnic background is I’m African American, Jewish, Cherokee, and French. So… and Dutch. I don’t know why I always leave off the Dutch. I do, but I’m also Dutch. And to see my communities just being decimated by gun violence breaks my heart every year. And I’m also pansexual, which makes me part of the LGTBTQIA+ community. And last year was not a great year for us.

C: It was not.

K: This year isn’t starting of any better for us, and it’s exhausting, to be honest. What do – how do you feel when you hear me talk about that?

C: I feel a lot of sympathy. So, I feel like I don’t identify as belonging to any of those groups, but I’m your partner, and you do.

K: Yeah, and ethnically you don’t belong to any – it’s not like you’re lying. Like you’re in denial about belonging to any of those groups. Just technically, you don’t belong to any of those groups.

C: Yeah. Culturally, two of my grandparents were English from England. One was Norwegian from Norway, and the other one… it depends on what lies you choose to believe, but it’s basically English.

K: He means the lies that his family tells because for many, many years his grandmother would say that they were Irish, and that was just the family joke because his grandfather had red hair.

C: Yes.

K: And then one of his brothers tried to move to Ireland, and then they found out that they are not Irish. Because, if you have an Irish grandparent, interestingly enough, you can

C: It’s easier. Like, I could move to Norway relatively easily because my grandmother was a Norwegian citizen from Norway.

K: Yeah. But you have to prove it.

C: Correct. Which I could do.

K: Yeah. So, something that… I don’t usually google, and I don’t usually research, but

C: For podcasts.

K: Yeah, for the podcast. I google and research my eyeballs out for my school. So, on January 1st, 2020, there were over 35 gun-related deaths in the United States. In one day. And I didn’t expect the number to be that high. Just looking at one day.

C: Right.

K: And I was like holy mackerel, that’s more deaths in one day than in an entire year in Japan.

C: Well, and that’s just the number that get reported.

K: Yes. And, so, I use gun violence archives to look at it, and they’re really respected. A lot of other news outlets and news sources that I respect use them to report on gun violence. And I was surprised that, on average in the United States, 42 people a day die from gun violence. 42 people. That number blows my mind.

C: Mhm.

K: That’s more than an entire year in Japan.

C: Yes.

K: But, yet, the argument is that gun ownership doesn’t affect gun-related deaths. And here we have a country, Japan, where it’s really difficult, really, really difficult, to own a gun. Really, really difficult, like even the gun ranges you can use an air gun, but to have a colt .35 or something like that; it’s really, really difficult to get. And next to impossible, where even gangsters don’t use guns because they’re a horrific pain in the butt.

C: Well, and the penalty is so much more severe. So, if you get caught with a gun, the penalty is extremely severe. Shotguns are legal, but they have a lot of restrictions on them.

K: Yes, and every year you have to have

C: An inspection.

K: The police come to your home, they check it on a regular basis to see if it’s been fired, to see are you maintaining it properly, is it kept in the home properly, and you have to have all this paperwork of proof that you’re a hunter, basically, and that you go hunting.

C: Or farmers, too. In the rural areas, there’s wild Japanese monkeys that can be dangerous.

K: Yes. Life-threatening. I know their press and propaganda is that all the monkeys in Japan are lovely and gentle and nice, and that’s true for some of the species but not all. So, for me, my first instance – my first introduction to guns was my stepfather who was a Vietnam veteran. And he had a gun treasure trove. He owned almost every kind of gun there was. He had a lot of illegal firearms and munitions that he had smuggled back from his time in Vietnam, so he had like hand grenades and landmines and severe PTSD.

C: Yes.

K: So, I was able to see all of these, but he never let me touch any of them because I was about three or four years old, and he was like “you’re way too young.” So, I would accompany him to go hunting. And he would shoot animals with them and hunt, and he shot animals that we could eat, and he shot some predators. And he didn’t shoot them so – for any other reason than to keep them off the land and because he viewed them as being a danger to me and the other kids around the property. So, there was – it was a… in my formative years, I grew up in a nudist colony. And, so, there was just a bunch of naked people running around, and he felt like it was his job to protect us from predators and all of that. So, he would often go hunting and walking around, and he sometimes would spend weeks at a time in a Vietnam-styled dugout.

C: Mhm.

K: and I would go hang in the dugout with him underground. Which, for me, was just awesome fun. Looking back, I realize wow he had severe PTSD.

C: For you it was jerk fort.

K: Yeah, for me, I’m not traumatized by this at all in any way. And he had it secured, like everybody knew don’t go looking for it because you might literally be impaled.

C: Mhm.

K: And I just thought it was cool and neat, and it was something out of a fairy tale for me. And we didn’t do the Disney fairy tales: we did the original writings.

C: The Grimms.

K: Yeah, the Grimm fairy tales, so they were much more….

C: Grim.

K: Yeah, much more grim and violent. Which wasn’t a problem for me. And then, when we moved – we moved from there when I was about four or five to a housing project as one of the anchor families because we were financially stable, and it was the belief of this housing project that if you put people from mixed incomes into a housing project that that would help elevate the families that were low-income because there was lots of seminars and things that they could go to. And also mixing of classes: showing families what they could achieve.

C: Well, and the rules for sectioning housing in the U.S. have so much over the years because I knew people who were doing well who would be the managers for sectioning housing unit. It’s always been an experiment; how to have housing projects be more inclusive. It’s not always been a good experiment, but it’s always been an experiment.

K: Well, we were also in the – not, I wasn’t one of the planners – the planners were also hoping that the people in the surrounding community would be more accepting.

C: Right.

K: And have better funding for schools, so the school was really well-funded and all of that. So, my first experience of gun violence other than hunting with my stepfather was when I was about five years old. Yeah, I was – no, I was six at the time. When I was ix years old, there was a gang shootout in the housing community where we lived. And… it got – there’s rumors about how the fight started. Somebody asked a friend to go to the store, the friend came back and had spent their change. Anyway, somehow a girl who was pregnant got kicked in the stomach. And her boyfriend’s reaction to that was to shoot the boyfriend of the girl who had gotten in a fight with his girlfriend. And that led to a shootout that went the expanse of the complex. There was just a mass shootout. And there was a woman knocking on houses door to door with her kids begging for people to let her in, and nobody would. One of the things that I will always love my mother for is she opened the door for this woman, let her in, we all got into our vehicle, and we left.

C: Mhm.

K: But… when we got back, people very near and dear to me had been shot to death for no reason other than – one person was shot to death because there were rumors that there were a lot of guns in his house, and that was really scary to learn because we had a lot of guns in our house. Nobody knew about them, or – I’m not sure if nobody knew about them or if everybody was terrified of our house.

C: Mhm.

K: Because any time that – there were people that thought they wanted to fight my mother all the time. And she would say “cool, cool, yeah, come on in for a minute. Let me change my clothes.” And when they would come in, our house reeked of formaldehyde because my mother was a taxidermist. So, there were always dead animals, carcasses, in our home. And, usually my stepfather was cleaning an arsenal of guns at any ran- because guns have to be oiled pretty regularly. So, our house was a really scary scene. I know now looking back. And everybody was like “it’s cool. I don’t need to fight you.” So, just sitting down, and they probably saved themselves because my mother could throw down.

Every fight my mother was ever in, she beat the living shit out of whoever she fought. Like… she always had a can full of whip ass ready to open, so my mother was one of the most violent people I’ve ever known in my life, but she knew how to fight. So, I always felt lucky for them that they changed their mind. And me and my mother would joke around about it. “Ohh, they’re so smart.” And I’m like, “they are lucky. You would’ve beat them up.” And it was just a family conversation. So, I grew up with a lot of violence. I grew up with a lot of guns, and that was normal to me. What is odd to me is that I have never held a gun in my hand.

C: That’s interesting.

K: Yeah. I’ve never held – I’d held a BB gun in my hand, and that was only because someone had shot me in the chest with a BB gun, and I shot them back. And, when my mother found out, she came to the foster home I was at and beat the shit out of me for holding a gun. It was forbidden. So, I’ve had guns held on me, and that’s a little later in the conversation. So, what was your introduction to guns? You were raised – we talked about you being in Texas a lot, but we didn’t talk about you being raised in Alaska a lot.

C: Yeah. So, the states that I remember living in are Utah, Washington, Texas, and Alaska.

K: Mhm.

C: And.. in one of those, and I don’t remember which one, maybe Texas, my dad was a police officer. And, so, he had guns. And he was a motorcycle officer, so he had guns on a motorcycle.

K: (laughs) Why is the guns and motorcycle combination so serious for you?

C: I’m not sure.

K: “He had guns and a motorcycle.”

C: He and his coworkers would go out – it must have been Texas because he and his coworkers would go out on the weekends and shoot rattlesnakes.

K: Ah, okay.

C: So, that’s what I was thinking because my mom was really against him getting a motorcycle. She did not like that he had one. But he was like “I have to have it for work.”

K: Mhm.

C: She wasn’t against the guns, but she was against the motorcycle. I got a BB gun for my fifth birthday. So, a daisy spring-loaded BB gun. And I, just, there were always – always guns in our house. Always at least two. And, when I was in Alaska, one day our dad came home and said, “hey, I found a .357 magnum on the street.”

K: Whoa, what? (laughs)

C: “It was just lying there on the street. Perfectly good gun.”

K: Wow, okay. Don’t let that good gun go to waste.

C: Right? So, he turned it in to the police, they did checks, they waited a month. Nobody had claimed it. It hadn’t been u sed in any crimes that they could determine. So, it was his gun, then.

K: Nice. Free gun. Free-range gun.

C: Yeah. So, in jr. high, I was on the rifle team. So, I’m actually a pretty good shot despite how shaky I am.

K: And you have a really sexy scar because of it.

C: Thank you. That came later. That did not come from the rifle. Thank you.

K: He wasn’t shot.

C: That’s

K: Tell them about your scar.

C: The scar is on my forehead near my eye, and I was out at the gun range with friends, as one does, and my gun of choice was a .223, which is a small gun. A rifle but relatively light caliber. And my friend had a .30-06, which is a very heavy caliber. And… he had a scope on it. So, I was used to open sights, so my specialty was a .22 or .223 which was almost the same kind of bullet with open sights. And prone position. So, the sniper thing but without the telescopic sights. My friend had a .30-06 with telescopic sights, so I put it up. I didn’t have it properly braced against my shoulder. We were shooting watermelons at 300 yards, and, so, I shot, and the scope gouged a ring out of my forehead.

K: Yes.

C: Where it hit. And I bled

K: I think it’s a sexy scar.

C: Yeah. I bled profusely, but I still have a nice little reminder to properly brace. But… one of my friends in high school had – his father had died when he was younger, so he got a social security check every month. And he was a little bit older, he was 18, so every month he used his social security check to buy another gun. I think he had more than thirty guns at his house.

K: Mhm.

C: And we would go shooting regularly. Play pigeons. Target shooting. And, now, I don’t think we were being super responsible, but usually we were at least going to an approved gun range rather than just randomly out in the middle of nowhere.

K: So, what’s your – so, for me, I had that horrible experience with guns.

C: Right.

K: And then I had, when I was three, it was three or four is the first time I can remember my mother talking to me about being Black and the police.

C: Mhm.

K: And we were driving from California to Alabama. And, right before we hit Texas, my mother got out a blanket and taught my brother and I – because we were mixed race – taught my brother and I how to get on the floor and put blankets over us and then they would put – they had these big ice chests that they would also put on top of us, so we wouldn’t look like people in case the police pulled us over. Because, if we were pulled over, with both my brother and myself in the car, we would be taken away, and my stepfather could possibly be shot and killed. So, I learned that the police would possibly shoot and kill my parents for my mere existence. Both of them were White. My stepfather was White, and my mother was White. And that stuck with me. “Okay, police will kill you for being mixed race.”

C: Right.

K: And we did get pulled over once, and I remember pissing myself, and my brother pissed himself. And we went to the hotel and got cleaned up, and that was really… really tragic for me. And I remember the arguments that my mother had with my brother with him wanting to learn how to drive. And she was like “you don’t understand.” Because he wanted to drive cross-country from California to Alabama. And, for one of the family reunions, my mother was saying, “you can’t drive. It’s still not safe for you. Do you want do die? Do you really want – is this worth dying for?” is what she asked him. And he said, “yes.” And she said, “no child of mine is going to die simply because they want to drive. Therefore, I’m not going to teach you how to drive. As long as you think that you want to drive cross-country.” And he was like “I want to drive cross-country on a motorcycle.” She was like, “do you realize that you are just putting yourself out there. You might as well put a target on your back that says ‘kill me’ because you are going to die. You will be shot. You will be killed.” And then she described in graphic details the different ways that they killed black men on the route that he wanted to take, and I remember being present for that conversation thinking “holy shit, he really shouldn’t drive.”

C: Mhm.

K: And, most of them involved guns, but not all of them. And I was present for that conversation. And then, my mother when she taught me to drive, my mother taught me that even in California – we had the conversation n what to do when the police pull you over. And the conversation what to do when the police pull you over is put your hands on the steering wheel and then put both hands outside of the car or put both hands above your head and ask permission for each thing that you’re going to do. So, if a police officer asks you “may I see your driver’s license,” you ask them “may I remove my hands from the steering wheel?” “Yes.” “May I reach into my purse.” “May I” “May I” “May I” – just a series of “may I”s. And, even – the police, a lot of the police when I would do it, treated me like I was being ridiculous. But what my mother told me is you never know which police officer won’t think it’s ridiculous that you’re doing it, and it means the difference between you going to prison or dying. And… so, for me, the gun on the side of the policeman’s hip is a terrifying sight. And will be my entire life. Seeing a policeman with a gun will always terrify me and always be something that identifies me as being at risk. And it’s one of the reasons that we moved to Japan is that I don’ have to see guns.

C: Right.

K: So, for me, even the sight of a gun is a terrifying thing. Even the sight of a gun on a police officer. And it was really nice for me that I didn’t have the conver- did not have to have the conversation with my son until he was 23. Because he learned how to drive in Japan, and so it wasn’t until he was taking a trip back to the United States and also a trip to Australia where he intended to drive. And I said, “okay we have to have a really horrible conversation, but I believe this conversation will save your life.” And I can tell you honestly that there were police officer – have been numbers of times that police officers have had their hands on their gun with the snap undone, ready to shoot me, as they approached my car. And, if you follow us on twitter, or if you’ve seen a picture of me, you probably think that’s fantastical because you probably think I don’t look Black, and you’d be wrong. For racists, I look very Black. I know there are some African Americans who don’t even recognize that I’m Black, but these police officers identified me as something other than White.

C: Yeah, I think there’s two kinds: some of them identify you as Black, and some are just like “not-White and therefore not worthy.”

K: Yeah. And I don’t have any pictures of me with my hair down and curly, but most of the years – it’s just been since I got older that I always wear my hair up, but when I was younger I always wore my hair down, and it’s very, very curly. And, so, for me… not having to see a police officer with a gun made all the difference in the world and allowed my son to get to the age of 23 before I ever had to talk to him about the fact that him having an afro puts his life at risk.

C: And it was as recently as 2008, and I was with you, that a police officer approached your car with their hand on their gun ready to shoot you.

K: Yes.

C: We were driving through Idaho, which shout out to Idaho, super racist state.

K: Yes.

C: And you were speeding. Fair catch on that one.

K: Yes. I was going way too fast. Way, way too fast. I think I was doing over 100 miles an hour.

C: You were, yes.

K: I wanted to get through that fucking state. (laughs) Okay.

C: And rather than pulling over on the shoulder, like… the officer had wanted you to do, you waited until there was an exit to pull out.

K: Because I didn’t know that he wanted me to pull over on the shoulder.

C: Yeah, he told us that after.

K: Yeah.

C: And you pull over to a truck stop, and he approached the car fully intending to shoot you if you made even a movement, and then I think he saw, “oh there’s a guy in there. Oh, there’s a kid in there. Okay.” But, still

K: And then he went off on me.

C: Yeah, he did.

K: He went off on me. And he was visibly shaking, and he was

C: He went off on you about how scared he was for his life, which is always the reason to kill people if you’re a cop. “I was afraid for my life.”

K: Yes.

C: How scared he was for his life; how close he had come to shooting you. Like… all of that.

K: Yes.

C: And…

K: So, I don’t have a positive relationship with police being armed and with guns being available to everyone.

C: Yeah.

K: Because he thought I had a gun.

C: Mhm.

K: He believed I had a gun, and he believed that I intended to shoot him.

C: Mhm.

K: And, so, it was… by luck, several times by luck, that a police officer has not shot and killed me. You would think I would learn not to speed. I don’t always drive that fast, but

C: You don’t drive anymore because you don’t have a license anymore.

K: Yeah, but I wouldn’t speed like that in Japan. And, so… a speeding ticket, for me, turns into – in the United States, a speeding ticket turns into risking my life.

C: Yes.

K: Getting pulled over by the police turns into risking my life. I remember walking and saying, “hi” to some police officers, and they got out of their car and questioned me for being polite.

C: Mhm.

K: Saying, “hi, how’s your day going?” And, you know

C: Not being appropriately afraid.

K: Yes. Because I wasn’t afraid of them, I got searched, and a background check done. For saying hello to a police officer. And both of them had their hands on their guns while they were talking to me. So, for me, I don’t feel like the police should be armed. I don’t feel like people should be armed. And, in Japan, when they stop you and harass you, they do so and frisk in Japan. Knock on wood, that hasn’t happened to me, but I’m Japanese color. They stop and frisk White people in Japan quite often. My son has never been harassed in Japan. I don’t know – have you been harassed in Japan?

C: No, I have not.

K: I have several people that I know that get harassed on a regular basis, but they – if you’re walking after, so after the last train, Japan becomes – there’s more police on the street, so after the last train, the last train leaves at midnight, and if you’re walking the streets after midnight they assume that you’re drunk and up to no good.

C: Right. So, the perception that you’re drunk definitely increases the chance the police will stop you. So, I should say I haven’t ever been harassed by the police. The police do come by annually and check who lives in here, and they say they do it to everybody, and they have a book, so I think they actually do even for Japanese citizens. They keep a registry of who lives where.

K: Yeah, they do.

C: So, in some ways, Japan is more of a police state than the U.S. but in a lot of ways, it’s less of a police state, so

K: But it’s sure in the fuck safer. I don’t fear for my life.

C: It is safer to have encounters with the police as far as fatalities, but you have less

K: But I have – every time I saw a police officer in Japan, every single time, I was afraid.

C: Right.

K: Every single time. So, every single time I got in my car and drove, and I would see a police officer – you were in the car with me. You saw how terrified I became.

C: Yeah. I did. And, in Charles Segal Airport, we had the same experience

K: Where they were walking around with loaded guns and dogs.

C: Yeah. Loaded automatic

K: Machine guns.

C: Yeah.

K: In France. So, fuck you France. I was terrified.

C: Yes.

K: I do not like France. I had a miserable time in France. Hated the airport. Hated everything about it. I will never go back to France. Ever.

C: Yes.

K: It was just horrific. And we were in Paris. Like, we were in Paris, and there were people – there was so much violence, we were there for a week. And it was just violent – a violent act happened every single day near our hotel we were staying.

C: Well, when we landed at Charles Segal to go to a conference for you, we had been told that taxis were 55 Euros from the airport to the city center.

K: Yes. My university put out a bulletin for us.

C: And almost immediately, this guy came up “hey, are you looking for taxis?” We’re like, “yes, we’re looking for taxis.” “They’re this way.” Then we said, “it’s 55 Euros, right?” “No, no. That’s crazy. It’s at least 80 Euros. It’s so busy.” And like, led us to

K: It was so difficult to find a legal taxi.

C: Yeah

K: There were just random people that who would take your bags from you.

C: Yeah, so he was just trying to rent a car to drive us in to

K: Yeah, it was so bizarre.

C: We were like nope, nope, nope.

K: Like, no, we’re going to end up dead in a ditch.

C: So, we walked away from him and we found a legal taxi.

K: Yes.

C: And tipped them so that it came out to 80 Euros. My objection was not to the amount. It was to the unlicensed nature of it. That they were trying to fool us.

K: And then there were people on the freeway – literally on the freeway – with signs up saying that they were refugees asking for money and holding up their passports.

C: Yeah.

K: Saying that they were Syrian refugees. I had never seen panhandling on a freeway, and I was more worried for them. Like, that’s really dangerous because they also had children with them. As we drove into the city, we saw people fighting over garbage. Like, literally – there was… uh, two people who looked French to me, they were White looking to me, and they were arguing in French. They had reached into a dumpster and pulled something out of it, and they were fist fighting and got into a bloody fight over the garbage. This was before, again, before we even reached the hotel. And then there were two more fights after that, so we saw like three fistfights on the way to the hotel.

C: Right.

K: And I was like, “wow, okay, so not walking around Paris. That’s not going down.” Luckily, our hotel was right next door to the convention center where we were going. And then the first night we were there was when the axe or the machete crime or

C: Yeah. They robbed a jewelry store with an axe.

K: Yeah, so the first night we were there, somebody robbed a jewelry store with an axe. The grocery store where we would get our groceries from, they randomly closed it because everybody wanted to go on a smoke break during opening hours. They closed it and cursed us out for wanting to go into the business during its hours of operations.

C: Yes.

K: And there were a couple other robberies and break-ins, and then there was a warning for tourists: if you go out, don’t take any bags with you.

C: Right.

K: Because of knife crime. So, I don’t have a positive experience. And then, on the way back, in the – at the airport, they were walking around with automatic weapons and attack dogs.

C: Right.

K: So, that was Paris for me. (laughs)

C: Yes.

K: Which, I was just so happy to be back in Japan. Like, almost every time we leave Japan – with the, I loved Spain. Spain was beautiful and gorgeous. Even though it was the taxi strike when we went. Spain’s absolutely gorgeous. Want to go back to Spain. No guns. Didn’t see any guns anywhere.

C: So, Alaska’s open carry. I think they’re still open carry. Which means that it’s legal to carry a weapon anywhere except for certain – like, banks, post offices, and schools I think. As long as everybody can see it.

K: Mhm.

C: And… I think that Alaska has a gun culture problem. Like, there are people who legitimately use the guns for self-defense against moose primarily. Bears to some extent, but moose are much more dangerous to most people. But… I hear people say things on – Facebook is really bad for this – where people are like, “we grew up playing with BB guns, and we were just fine. Everybody now is just weaklings.” It’s like, okay, but no I can name half a dozen who are not fine.

K: Yes.

C: They’re not around to say they’re fine because they died.

K: Yup.

C: Because my high school – let’s see, there was a girl murdered before, just before I became a freshman there, and then when I was there, I think there were six gun deaths. And one of them was like, one person accidentally shot another. Another, somebody accidentally shot themselves. Then there was a couple of murders. There was one death that was a plane crash, it wasn’t a gun thing at all, but across the street from the high school was a pawn shop that had a great big sign that said, “if you try to rob this, I’ll kill you. I like killing people.” Like…

K: Yeah. Bragging, “I will shoot you dead. I’m a great shot.”

C: Yeah. That kind of thing. And… just, a lot of gun violence. A guy who I went to high school with, didn’t know very well, but was in my same class is serving life in prison for robbing a convenience store. But he did it with a machete. But the convenience store down the street from where I lived when I was working at McDonald’s: somebody came in and murdered the clerk and murdered two of the customers. To rob it at a time that I might have been there, so I was a block away. I have been held at gun point a few times.

K: I have been held at gun point a few times as well.

C: I was first held at knife point when I was six, but that only happened once. And… by another child, so Kisstopher thinks it’s funny. Because it was by another child.

K: Don’t tell people my – I didn’t laugh out loud.

C: You did laugh out loud. You just moved your mouth away from the microphone.

K: (soft laugh) Yes. I’m heartless. Everybody knows I laugh inappropriately. It’s at things that traumatize Chad. I’m a horrible wife. I’m a horrible wife.

C: And my foster brother shot himself. So… I don’t have a good relationship with guns even though I am very good at shooting them.

K: So, for me personally, the first time I ever had a gun held on me, I was 15. Not counting the BB gun. So, I was shot with a BB gun.

C: I’ve been shot with a BB gun. Shot with a pellet gun. Like, it’s not good, don’t do it. But

K: So, the first time I was threatened with a gun that wasn’t a BB gun was a foster relative of mine, and they were polishing their gun, and they pointed at me and pulled the trigger. I didn’t know that it was empty.

C: Yeah.

K: They thought it was hilarious. I did not think it was hilarious. And they did that because I had been eating their army rations. Which is true because the foster family had a lock on the refrigerator and lock on the freezer. And designated eating times. And I wasn’t always around at designated eating times because I had extracurriculars.

C: Right.

K: And they had rations that they had gotten back from being in the military. And, so, I would go in – and I loved the rationed peanut butter, so I would go in and eat their peanut butter. And they also had an acre of land behind the house with fruit trees, so I would just climb up in the fruit trees, get a bunch of fruit and peanut butter, and that would basically be my dinner. And he thought it was really, really funny to be like, “so,” and they were cleaning the gun in front of me. They put the gun together in front of me while they were talking to me about “somebody had been in their rations” and then they pointed the gun at me and pulled the trigger.

C: Mhm.

K: And… I didn’t fuck with their rations anymore, so point made. And I didn’t really hang out with them anymore. And they were run of the reasons that I ran away. Then, again, when I was 15, I was in an abusive relationship. And I was often pistol-whipped and had guns held to my head. I saw my mother, when I was about 4 years old, my stepfather held a gun to her head that was loaded. And she called me into the room, and he didn’t shoot her because he saw me.

C: Mhm.

K: So, I am biased against guns. I hope that people in the U.S. get over this second amendment bullshit. When the second amendment was written, it was also a time in American history where we could own other human beings. The time of slavery. And gun violence, like, they say, “guns don’t kill people. People do.” It’s complete bullshit. The one thing every gun violence has in common is fucking guns. Like, come on. And if you’re in denial about that, if you just want to own guns, just fucking own it. Just say, “I am a violent motherfucker who wants to own a gun.”

C: Mhm.

K: Just own it. And be real. And saying, “hey, I don’t want psych evaluations to become a thing because they would take my guns away because I wouldn’t pass a psych evaluation.” Say, “I don’t want any sort of legislation that limits anything because I would be the person left out.” Be honest about that.

C: Right.

K: And make your case about that. Because I don’t think that mental illness is the thing that every gun violence act has in common. I think there are people who are rational and plan it out and believe that what they’re doing is right. And I think it bashes the mental health community, those that work with people on the mental health spectrum, and that may have mental health issues, and those that have mental health issues. So, I have PTSD, I have a lot of trauma that I’m dealing with. I’ve never touched a gun. I don’t want to own a gun. I’m not the reason that gun violence exists. So, please stop blaming the mentally ill, and please stop saying that mental illness is a justification for gun violence. It’s not.

Guns cause guns violence. If people don’t own guns, they can’t have gun violence. And I’m not saying that Japan is better than America by any means. Last year, there was a family that was – somebody broke into their home because the door was unlocked – they just walked in and killed everyone in the family, there was only one survivor, with a knife. So, I know knives are dangerous too.

C: Yeah. A few years ago, there was the massacre in Sagamihara with a knife, so… yes. Knives can kill people, too, but they’re much less efficient at it.

K: Yes. And it’s usually lower numbers of deaths.

C: Right.

K: So, one of the main reasons that I – that we live in Japan and not the United States, for me it was how do I keep a Black man safe in the United States? That answer was getting harder and harder for me to answer.

C: Yeah.

K: And, in Japan, it was a lot simpler. Just be a decent human being, and that’s working out really well for him. And, in Japan, I’ve never been threatened with a gun.

C: Yeah.

K: In Japan, I’ve never been afraid for my life. In Japan, though, I did have – I was walking late in the evening, and I did have someone try to run me down with a car.

C: Right.

K: And, then when they were trying to get out of their car, I kicked their car door and slammed them in it. And I just lost my – lost my natural motherfucking mind. Every ounce of violence came out in me, and I was trying to beat – I wanted to get at them and beat the crap out of them. They sped off terrified of their life. They thought they were going to abduct me. Think again. So… that’s happened once in over 14 years of living here, and in the United States, that would happen on a regular basis to me. So… you know. There’s that.

C: Yeah.

K: So, I just feel like there’s so much less violence. And I think, once you and I got married, it happened a lot less often because I was out by myself a lot less frequently.

C: I think so. Yeah.

K: And it was 2’oclock, 2 or 3 – no, I think it was 5’oclock in the morning. Because I was walking before the sun came up.

C: Right.

K: That happened once early on. We were living in a really bad neighborhood. I didn’t know it was a bad neighborhood.

C: Yeah, we didn’t

K: All the neighborhoods look the same to me. I can’t identify. Everybody’s like, “yeah, that’s the ghetto”, and I’m like, “it looks the same.”

C: Well, and the apartment then had been rented for us before we saw it, so we didn’t even get the chance to go see it before it was rented for us.

K: Yeah. So… I still can’t identify good neighborhoods and bad neighborhoods in Japan. They all look the same to me, and I think they all look the same to me because nobody has a dryer. Everybody hangs their clothes on the line. And, so, for me in the United States

C: So, you’re saying you can’t identify rich neighborhoods and poor neighborhoods.

K: Yes. And, so, that’s how – and the money and rent is the same in bad neighborhoods.

C: Right.

K: Like, there’s no difference.

C: Well, and here, even the types of shops are similar, so…. Yeah. That’s a thing.

K: So, if we didn’t scare you off or upset you too bad, we’re going to do a take two, and you can hear our thoughts on why we recorded this episode now. And we appreciate you hanging with us and hope that you do it again. I hope next week – I think next week will be much lighter than this week.

C: Yes.

K: Yeah, but that was on my brain. Thanks for hanging with us, and I’ll talk to you later.

C: Bye.

K: Bye.