

Lawanda-Lata-Preston, Part 2, 08-25-22.mp4

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:00:09] Um, I just remember that we were, uhh, talking about something that made you resilient, or some type of challenge, challenges that you'd had in life. And, um. I don't know. I guess I wasn't ready for it because I skipped right over. Um. Um. My husband, my daughter, myself, my, uh, sister in law and her two kids, uh, and one of the kids being the niece I was up visiting, uhh, last week. We were in a tragic, uh, car accident and my husband was killed. That was in 1995. Um, our daughter, she was 13 and about to start high school. And, so, um, totally unexpected. We had gone cross country. We went to, uh, visit family. In Mississippi. We were in Mississippi, I don't know, for about seven days or so. And then we went to um. His hometown, uh, Montgomery, Alabama, and then other parts of, um, Alabama. And we were there, I don't know, five or six days. Left there, went back to Mississippi, and we were there a couple of days. And we were driving, by the way. In a, uh, rental van. And we, we were just taking our time. Made it as far as, uh. Barstow. And, uh, before Barstow, I had been driving. And I got off to get gas, but I never looked down at, uh, the gas gauge. And, but I got off. And so when I got off, um, I realized that, uh, we had about three quarters of a tank. So he decided that he would drive. So he drove, started driving, and we got to Barstow, and by then we needed gas. And so he got off to get the gas. Uh. We went around a bend and they decided to change the lanes from right to left. And as he changed lanes, we were hit by a Greyhound bus. And so, um, he was the fatality. You know, we were in Barstow, of all places, uh, maybe he would've lived, if uh. He had been in another city. But, um, anyway, we were in Barstow. And so that, um, to say that the, uh, next five years were difficult would be an understatement. You know, you've got a 13 year old daughter and all of a sudden you are a, uh, single parent. Uh, she's in high school. Um, it's a traumatic experience for her and it's a traumatic experience for you and you're just trying to deal with life.

Lata Murti: [00:04:00] Thank you for sharing that, Lawanda. So what helped you through?

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:04:09] Uh, time.

Lata Murti: [00:04:10] Time?

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:04:11] Yeah. Time. My faith, um, brought up in a very. Uh, Bible believing household. And to know that there is life after death. That there is eternal life. And, um. Then I had, uh. There were some people in my life who also helped, um, you know, had lots of, uh, phone calls. The pastor's wife, I think she came every day for about a month and she would just sit. Never say a word. She would just sit for hours on end. And then, um. Very close colleagues, uh, at work. I had worked, uh, was working for the public defender's office, I'd worked for them since '84. Um, and I had been, uh, promoted to chief investigator in January, which was, uh, an administrative management position. Um. So I was working out of the Santa Barbara office. But when that happened, there was no way I could, uh, go back to Santa Barbara because I needed to make sure that she got to school. Um, and then, she went to, she went to counseling every day.

Preston Allen: [00:05:57] Mm hmm

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:05:57] You know, there were just a lot of things. I, I did the, uh, the. uh, grief counseling for a couple of months. And, um, I had gone back to work. I was off work for about four months. Then I went back to work and I'm trying to do counseling. And you sit there and you cry and you go back to work. And that just. that just, that wasn't good at all. But, um, I, I remember a friend. At the time, I just knew I didn't know her very well. But her husband, uh, was a public defender. And, um. She just took it up on herself. She would send me a card every day. Um, sometimes she would send me a meal. She'd have a meal delivered to me or, or something like that. But she did that every day, faithfully over a year, and I'll never forget that.

Preston Allen: [00:07:09] Mm hmm.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:07:09] You know, just "thinking of you" cards.

Preston Allen: [00:07:12] Yeah.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:07:13] Yeah.

Lata Murti: [00:07:19] So, Lawanda, you had said in your message that. Well, you'd indicated that it's hard to talk about this with your daughter. Present. Are you? Are you able to talk about that some more?

Lata Murti: [00:09:01] I was asking about something you had mentioned in your last message about uh. About it being hard for you to talk about what happened to your husband when your daughter. Is, is there. Um.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:09:27] Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, uh, we, we both still have our moments. Her, probably more than me.

Lata Murti: [00:09:39] Mm hmm.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:09:39] Yeah.

Lata Murti: [00:09:42] I mean, having a daughter who just started high school. Who's having a hard enough time. Um, just starting high school, I mean.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:09:56] Yeah.

Lata Murti: [00:09:57] I, I can't. I can't imagine so. Yeah.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:10:00] Yeah. You know. Um, the school was great.

Lata Murti: [00:10:08] Good.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:10:09] She was going to be going to, um. To Righetti or, uh, Saint Joe. And when that happened, uh, she wanted to go where her friends, most of her friends were going to Santa Maria High. And so anyway, I enrolled her at Santa Maria High. Um, she wasn't able to. Attend full time. So, uh, there was an assistant principal. Jim Boyle. B-o-y-l-e. Um, the Boyles, uh, are family friends. The, um. His wife was also a teacher and, uh ironically, he died probably about three months ago. But he took her under his wing. Um, she was his T.A., and he was always checking on her to make sure that she was okay. [long pause]

Lata Murti: [00:11:23] So did you still keep in touch?

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:11:27] Yeah, we're. We're, um, the family. They're friends of the family. And so, uh, they're friends with my aunt.

Lata Murti: [00:11:39]

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:11:43] Emma lives in Houston. And my Aunt Mary, she lives in Mississippi. Uh, and I probably told you guys this before, but anyway, I'll mention that again. And so they're good friends with them.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:14:17] Yeah. And, uh, how wonderful Jim was. Uh, in fact, Angela was, uh, Erika's tutor, handwriting tutor when she was younger.

Preston Allen: [00:14:31] Mm hmm.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:14:32] Kind of interesting, but the, uh, teachers back then, they thought that her penmanship wasn't that great. And so she used to go to Angela for, uh, tutoring. But he just took her under his wings and, uh, she was his T.A. and he was always checking on her. And it's kind of ironic that he, uh, he passed away about three months ago.

Lata Murti: [00:15:12] So you also mentioned in your message that this all of what you just talked about. Really shaped your experience. On the Central Coast. Um. And you've, of course. Addressed why, in part, but are there any other ways you see that having defined? Your life or changed your life. On the Central Coast.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:17:37] Yeah, that, uh, that accident. I, I know. I didn't even, uh, talk about that. And that's definitely part of my lived experience.

Lata Murti: [00:18:31] This might be too difficult to answer, Lawanda.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:18:37] Mm hmm.

Lata Murti: [00:18:39] But. You think that experience on the Central Coast was different as a Black woman? Then it would have been otherwise. Is it too hard to say?

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:19:02] I never. No, I never think about it like that. Um. I am, uh. I-I'll say that I'm. Programmed somewhat differently. And I don't like to blame everything on race. So I'd like to look at. The total picture. Now I do find things that are very, uh. I do experience even now, I will say a lot of mic- what I would call microaggression, particularly around my hair.

Lata Murti: [00:20:13] So you were talking about microaggressions with your hair.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:20:19] Yeah. So this, this one woman, um. I see her almost daily with her. Her and her husband and a small dog. And either they're in front of me or behind me. And we never say more than good morning. Well, last week, I was, uh, across the street and she yelled from across the street, "How much does your hair weigh?" You know, I'm just like. I, I, I almost lost it. And I have been telling people about it. I said, "You know," I said, "Why was someone," first of all, it's rude? Is that the best conversation you can have with a person? Is how much does your hair weigh? And, um, a lot during, during COVID. And this was even, uh, uh Latina women would come up to me and they would say, "Oh, your hair is so beautiful." And they would put their hand in my hair. Or say, and I think people have learned by now. "Can I touch it?" I'm very in your face and, no, the answer is no. And several times when I was at the dog park, I would have like. Um. Men, primarily white would say, uh. "Is that your real hair?" No hello. No nothing. But "Is that your real hair?" And I just said, "Don't you think that is very rude?" I just, you know, it's just crazy. But there seems to be a lot of microaggression around our hair. And I don't know if it's from that Chris Rock movie, but not all black people have waves in their hair. I went into, uh, Trader Joe's and. It was when they used to have the, uh, the little coffee snack bar area where you could, uh, you could try whatever they have. And so I would always, you know, get a little small cup of coffee and put some cinnamon in it. And so the same lady was always there. So she looks at me and she said, "You know, I really like your dreads." I wasn't wearing dreads.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:23:27] So, um, you know, I, I think overall, I just kind of look at the, uh. Totality of things. Um, I'm sure that there is some discrimination, but because I'm able to speak up and speak out. Um, it doesn't affect me the same way that it, it maybe, uh, would affect someone who's not able to, um. To speak up and amplify their voice.

Lata Murti: [00:24:17] So, Lawanda, in, in '95, were you an active member of NAACP? Locally?

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:24:28] Mm, yes, I was um. I'm trying to, uh, Smiley died in, um. Now, Smiley died in 2007. Smiley was our, um, past president. Smiley Wilkins. Um,

so I've been a member of the Santa Maria Lompoc branch since 1973. Off and on. Um, as a matter of fact, when they had the, um, became Santa Maria Lompoc because they were Santa Maria. And then Lompoc joined them in '73. Uh, my family, actually, we, uh, cooked the meal. We cooked the meal for the, uh, the, the banquet. Tri tip, bean salad, garlic bread. So it was Santa Maria style, um, uh, barbecue that was served and that was at the, um, the, uh, Veterans Memorial Center in Santa Maria. Um, there were times when I was not as active. I probably, sometimes I'd only attend one meeting. Now there's, um, w,e we've had, had a, uh, fashion show for years and years and years. Like, um. I think 33, 34 years. We actually had a professional fashion show every December. And I went to the first one, which was at the, um. Civic, uh, Auditorium in Lompoc. And then, uh, I think I went off to, uh, to college in Long Beach. And missed those between '75 and '77. And when I returned in '77, until we no longer, um. Had the, uh, professional fashion show. I, I believe I've only missed two.

Lata Murti: [00:27:01] So were there particular ways that the Black community on the Central Coast helped to support you? And your daughter? After your husband's tragic death?

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:27:20] Yes. Um, I don't think it was just the Black community though. Um. Because I, I have a diverse group of friends. So I, I can't say specifically the Black community, but the, um, uh, uh, Agatha Shorter- Lewis. Who died, um. last October. Yeah, last October. Excuse me. Um, she used to pick me up. You know, because my, depending upon who you talk to. My leg was broken in like three places. And so I wasn't able to drive or to get around. And she would pick me up and get me to, uh, church, to attend church. Every Sunday and I, I did help people. They would, uh, make dinner, um, those type of things. But, you know, I mean, uh, when you're going through something, uh, that tragic, some people eat a lot, some people don't. And we were in the don't group. You know, But we, you know, like even my family, uh, back in Mississippi, like, my aunt came back again and spent some time with me, my Aunt Mary. So she returned and spent some time with us. Um, I had family members, you know, I had people calling every day. Check in. Um, my cousin Larry, and, um, his wife at the time that lived here, Um, they would often invite us to their house for dinner. Um, except I kind of thought his wife was a little bit weird with that. She had a little boy. He was two months old and he died from SIDS. And so she felt like she had uh. Had been. Through that experience and life goes on. And she even told me

so. And so, you know, I mean, you just should be able to go on with your life and not grieve and not cry and just, you know. Uh, it, it didn't work that way for us. And I said that people grieve however--they, I truly understand that, that people grieve however they need to. And if, if someone is uncomfortable with it, that's their problem. That's not your problem.

Lata Murti: [00:30:35] Preston, did you have anything you wanted to ask?

Preston Allen: [00:30:42] I, I do appreciate you adding that dimension of your life, because, uhh, clearly those kinds of moments are really important to the overall who we are, uhh, and, uhh, and they, and they complete our story as we journey on. So I really do appreciate and thank you for doing that.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:31:04] Well, thank, thank you. I hope for, uh, I, I don't know why I think maybe. I was in a, uh, maybe a painful,

Preston Allen: [00:31:14] Yeah.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:31:14] Uhh, unconscious, uh, time frame there.

Preston Allen: [00:31:21] Yeah.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:31:21] Um. And just, you know, because, I don't know, I just thought it was kind of weird that I didn't say anything about it.

Preston Allen: [00:31:27] Yeah. You weren't ready. And that, that's okay, too, right? Yeah,

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:31:34] Yeah,

Preston Allen: [00:31:35] Yeah. I appreciate it, though. Thank you.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:31:38] Yeah. And that, that part of, uh, of my life is important. And actually, I use what happened to us. Um. There have been times when, uh, I've had friends. Uh, and family members who, who've suffered a tragedy. And I've

been able to, to use my experience to comfort them. And they actually understood. They knew that I understood how they felt.

Lata Murti: [00:32:27] Is there anything else you'd like to add or share with us?

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:32:32] No, no, I think we've covered everything now. That's the, uh, the complete story.

Lata Murti: [00:32:42] Are you still keeping up with all of your COVID efforts?

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:32:47] I am. I am. As a matter of fact, we have one at the Labor Day picnic next Friday and, um.

Lata Murti: [00:33:02] The vaccination clinic?

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:33:03] Right. And the, uh, and it's from 2 to 6:30 and you should, the target is to get, uh, do 25, uh, vaccinations.

Preston Allen: [00:33:38] Mm hmm.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:33:42] And then, um, we, uh, we're going to go to Guadalupe to, um, they were having a health resource fair this weekend on Saturday. But that was canceled.

Preston Allen: [00:34:05] Hmm

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:34:05] Yeah, that was canceled. And so. We have, um. The Labor Day picnic on the 2nd where we'll be doing COVID outreach. Then we have an event in Cuyama. I think that's September the 23rd. Um. Yeah. And then we're going to do an event with MICOP, which we did a couple of weeks ago. We did a vaccination clinic with them, and, uh, it was. It was really good because they had, uh, families. They had signed up families to come in and get backpacks for school. And they had like 368 backpacks for family members to come in and get. And so we're going to do another one and probably open it up a little bit more to the public because, uh, Fighting Back Santa Maria actually donated some money for, uh, for backpacks. So we want to be sure that we use it.

Preston Allen: [00:35:14] Yeah.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:35:15] Yeah.

Lata Murti: [00:35:16] Are you still going door to door?

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:35:21] Um. Not in the, uh, last couple of months. Yeah, not in the last couple of months. We probably need to start that. Um. I was on a meeting with the state yesterday and the, uh, 93458 area, which is. I, I, you know, I was kind of surprised. I thought it was just Northwest Santa Maria, but I think it's West Santa Maria. I think it also includes the South. And, so, anyway, that, that area needs to be, um. There needs to be some outreach there, particularly with the, um. The children like from six months to about 17. Those rates are low.

Lata Murti: [00:36:15] Mmm.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:36:16] Yeah. So we need to do some outreach. I know the schools that they were, you know, they had it at the schools, but now we have the, it goes all the way down to six months now.

Preston Allen: [00:36:29] Yeah.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:36:30] Yeah.

Lata Murti: [00:36:33] Yeah..about how many awards or recognitions have you received over the years for the work you've done for the Central Coast?

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:36:44] Oh, I don't know. It was, uh, really, it was really a bit much [laughs] this year. Um. You know, I mean, I, I just, the work I do. I do the work. I don't do it for the, uh, the awards, recognition. And, um, I was really a little bit taken aback when, um. You know, the, uh, I think it was the Public Health, the, uh, Women's Commission, Santa Barbara County Women's Commission. Um. State Senator Monique Limon. Um. Uh, Congresswoman Salud Carbajal. And I actually had another organization. They said, "We want to give you an award." And I'm like, "No, that's okay. That's okay." You know, I mean, that's enough. That's enough. I just, you know, I just, I

just, you know, I mean, you can put my name out there so that people know that I'm a trusted messenger, but I can do without all the awards, you know? Yeah, so.

Lata Murti: [00:37:56] That's. That's. That's big hearted of you. That's really bighearted.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:38:03] I do it. I do it because our community need it. And, um, you know, I just, just have a vested interest in making sure that our community, that they get the other resources and that they have the information that they need to have.

Preston Allen: [00:38:22] Yeah. We appreciate and, and, and love lifting you up so that others can, uh, kind of do what they can as well. But, yeah, we do appreciate all your work. Yeah.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:38:35] Thank you. Thank you. I. I'm. Um. Hoping the next generation will do likewise.

Preston Allen: [00:38:45] Yeah.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:38:46] And, and recognize that we all need to, um, support our community.

Preston Allen: [00:38:51] Yeah.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:38:53] Yeah.

Lata Murti: [00:38:58] Do you have any, um? To wrap up, do you have any, uh, success stories? Especially related to COVID from talking to members of the community?

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:39:13] Well, one thing that we've been doing, we've been doing, um, instead of the door to door approach, one thing that we've been doing is, uh, we think that we can reach more of the masses, particularly if we go into these, uh, senior apartment complexes, if we do the churches, um, uh, including and I had I just hadn't thought of it like the , uh, Jehovah's Witnesses. I hadn't thought of doing any outreach, and, um, one of, uh, I call him my assistant. He asked me if I, uh, because he was actually brought up Jehovah's Witness, and, um, he asked me. He said, "Well,

would you consider that?" I said, "Well, do they," you know, "Are they getting the vaccine? And do they want the information? And he said, "Yeah." And I'm like, well, I just hadn't thought of it. So anyway, we've, uh, we've been doing outreach to all the, uh. The, uh, faith based communities in Santa Maria and Lompoc. But we have, uh, particular zip codes that we've been doing. And we just went out to Orcutt, by the way, to do the, um, the Boy Scouts. I was actually asked to speak last week. And it was, it was supposed to be three kids. Uh, might be a few more. And I was surprised. I, I went to the, uh, the church, and a room full of kids came in and they're, uh, scoutmasters or whatever they are.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:41:00] And I talked to them about, uh, diversity, equity and inclusion. And then I had, uh, taken my, uh, over-the-counter test kits, uhh, uh, information on COVID and English and Spanish hand sanitizers. And, uh, you know, they were really excited to get it. But I guess the best story that I would tell is when, when I went to, is the, um, senior complex on the corner of Main and Broadway. And the lady had, uh, one of the managers had reached out to me and, uh, asked if I, um, you know, she wanted the, uh, the mask and the hand sanitizers, blah, blah, blah. And, um, so I think I, I took her like it wasn't that many the first time, and then the next week. And my, my neighbor, he has a truck. He's, um, 83 and he drives me around. He kind of loves doing it also. Anyway, uh, we showed up there and I have the wagon and we're going in and we're bringing, uh, these boxes in. With masks, hand sanitizer, uh, the, uh, test kits. And this lady is jumping up and down like a kid. She's so excited to get it. And that just, that really made my day. So knowing, you know, to me, like knowing that people really appreciate it. It just, it does something good for your spirit.

Preston Allen: [00:42:47] Yeah.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:42:49] Yeah. Like one time I, um. I was doing door to door and, um, it was, uh, uhhm, quite a few. It was probably about six or seven, uh, farm workers. And I went up and we, we made the bags up of over-the-counter test kits, hand sanitizers, the masks. And, uh, of course, you know, we always put information in about about, uh, the vaccine. And they actually thought that they had to pay for it. And when they found out they didn't have to pay for it, they were so excited. Yeah.

Lata Murti: [00:43:39] That's why you do it, right?

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:43:41] Yeah.

Lata Murti: [00:43:41] That means more than the, than the awards.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:43:45] Yeah, and because the, the um. I mean, there's a need.

Preston Allen: [00:43:51] Yes.

Lata Murti: [00:43:51] There's a need.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:43:52] Yeah, there's a need and, um. You know, like. When, when we first started out and we would hold the vaccine clinics and we would get like 10 or 20, and I'm like, "Oh," that's all we got. And, there was some measure of disappointment. And then at some point it hit me, "Well. If you get one vaccinated, even one. That person, you, you may have saved that person's life."

Preston Allen: [00:44:28] Mm hmm.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:44:28] And so that's sort of how I look at it.

Lata Murti: [00:44:37]

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:44:43]

Lata Murti: [00:44:44]

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:44:46] I send so many emails. Honestly [laughs], I send so many emails. That's why I'm trying to do that newsletter. Um, in the hope that I won't have to send out so many emails. Some people love them and then there are some people who don't.

Preston Allen: [00:45:08] Yeah.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:45:09] But my thing is, if, if, uh, there's the delete button, I've, uh, disseminated the information into the community and. There's always the, uh,

delete button. But when, when I send information out there, I send it because I think it's important that you know.

Preston Allen: [00:45:30] Yeah.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:45:32] Yeah.

Lata Murti: [00:45:35] And I appreciate that.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:45:38] Yeah, I know you guys do. And thank you all so much for, uh, doing this project and doing what you're doing. It's going to be interesting to see how it works out.

Lata Murti: [00:45:53] Thank you. Yes. Yes, it is ongoing.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:49:22] Yes.

Lata Murti: [00:49:23] Thank you.

Lawanda Lyons-Pruitt: [00:49:25] Absolutely.

Lata Murti: [00:49:29] Alright, Lawanda, you and your daughter take good care.