

A major myth about human trafficking is that most trafficked persons are taken against their will....snatched off the street, thrown into a van. Or that they are runaways or drug users, exhausted of options, of money, and of hope. Most, at the beginning, are leaving home to pursue a good job abroad. Then they find they have been sold, they owe tens of thousands of dollars and will have to buy themselves back.

Read the words of trafficked women and try to imagine what that journey must be like.

And remember that for every victim of sex trafficking worldwide there are nine forced labor and/or domestic servitude cases.

I was nineteen. My boyfriend told me I could be a waitress in Portugal.
We had been together for a year and a half.

-Lena, Moldova

When I was 24, I visited St. Petersburg. I was preparing to return home to my village, waiting at the train station one day when a woman approached me. She started talking with me about life problems, encouraging me to share mine with her.

We had a nice talk, and the woman suggested that she could help me to get work somewhere abroad. She told me she had an acquaintance in Germany, a woman who could connect me with a family for whom I could be a housemaid.

-Marsha, Russia

He asked if it would be out of place if he said I was pretty. I was like, 'No.' I mean, it was a compliment.

He said that he was a model agent, [that] he was looking for new models in the area. They said they were on their way to California to go back to their office and they were going to do some more photo shoots, and they wanted me to go along with them. He said that I could probably make about a thousand or more. ... He said I could try it for three days. ... And so I went with them.

-Miya, United States

A friend I knew from the market in Nakhon Sawan told me about the opportunity to work in factories in Japan. I had divorced my Thai husband when I was four months pregnant and now my son was three years old and I had to raise him by myself and was finding it difficult to make enough money.

My parents asked me not to go, but I thought if I went for just one year I could make money for my family and son.

-Pot, Thailand

I was surprised to be locked up because I was not allowed any chance to say goodbye to my family, even over the phone. I heard the agents talking about the price for each woman being between 150-160 bai [1.5-1.6 million yen; US\$10,000-11,000], but I couldn't really understand what they were talking about and did not realize that we were being sold into prostitution. I was feeling suspicious but still wasn't clear about what was going on.

-Pot, Thailand

After a few days, Geanna told me she could not find a family who would hire me as a housemaid. She said I owed her 2,000 German marks (about \$1,000 USD) and said that I would earn that money by providing sexual services to men.

I was afraid to say no because she had taken my passport, and I didn't know any German. She and her husband, who was a drug dealer, threatened to beat me if I tried to leave, and said if I went to the police, I would be deported.

-Marsha, Russia

Damir took us to a house where the streets are dirty and we see beggars and even rats during the day. We were nervous because we expecting something very different than that. When we enter the house it smelled as bad as the ship. There were many girl's magazines, wine bottles and cigarettes on the floor. Some men were sitting inside, they laughed and looked at us in bad way and speak to Damir in Italian, which we did not understand.

I asked him who they are, but the polite young man from my father's shop grab my arm and said something very bad in Albanian. He hit me on the face. I fell on the ground and he pulled me by hair into a room and hit me more than once until my face start bleeding. I did not understand what has happened. I heard other girls screaming. And then he raped me.

-Maria, Albania

I held out for five days, crying, with no food. Eventually I lost my honor and my virginity for \$25.

-Name Unknown, Dominican Republic

That was when I realized I had been sold. Because she gave money to the Arab guy, and my passport was taken.

-Lena, Moldova

I saw that I had traded one type of hell for another. I did what I had to do, because I was doing it for my daughter.

-Sasha, Amsterdam

One can endure anything except hunger. If I were a man, maybe I would have committed murder to fill my stomach. But as a woman, I became a prostitute.

-Manju, Nepal

I'm no star; I'm just a whore, that's all.

-Siri, Thailand

If you see us only as victims you have missed the point.

-Cherry, Canada