

Things I Learned as a Sex Slave in Modern America

When you hear about modern-day slavery, you probably picture some third-world brutality occurring in Africa or Southeast Asia (and if you just muttered something about your unpaid office internship, go ahead and slap yourself right now). When you hear about sex trafficking, you imagine a gang of Eastern European thugs kidnapping women and getting chased down by Liam Neeson.

But, incredibly, human trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar industry in the United States (and Canada) today. Statistically, Liam Neeson is more likely to sell his own daughter into slavery than have her stolen by some mysteriously brown Parisians. We wanted to know how this was possible, so we sat down with "Jane," a former sex slave, and asked her about her life.

NOTE: If reading this doesn't disturb you, there is a good chance you are a crazy person.

Sex Slavery Is a Thriving American Industry

I was 4 or 5 years old when it started.

If you're expecting my "sold into child slavery" story to begin with guys in ski masks bursting into my bedroom and snatching me up in the night, the actual story is worse, in a way. One night, my stepdad just pulled me out of bed and said, "Come here, uncle needs to see you." There were zero uncles downstairs. But there were several creepy, creepy men who passed me around from lap to lap and paid him for the privilege. If you're asking yourself where my mother was, well, she was right there, watching.

My stepdad and mother would have people over all hours of the night, drinking and smoking crack. Sort of like family game night, as directed by Darren Aronofsky. She was in on the decision to do what they did (and if you want to give yourself nightmares, try to imagine the conversation that led them to broach the subject). When I was that age, it didn't go beyond "sit on uncle's lap." I'd do as I was told and they'd call me a good girl and that was that -- I obviously had no idea what was going on. Then I got a few years older, and they started sending me off on "private sessions." Yes, that means exactly what you think it means. Let's not kid ourselves.

The next question that's flashing through your mind is probably, "Why didn't you tell someone?"

I did -- I was just 6 years old when I (accidentally) mentioned something about my "uncles" to a teacher - I just said something like: "My uncle's came over and we had fun," because those were the words my mom always used. If you think at this point a SWAT team raced to my house and busted everyone, you and I live in different worlds. What happened instead was the teacher called my mom, and she talked her way out of it somehow. When I got home, she beat me up, I think to ensure her soul was completely damned to Hell.

What a crazy, unusual situation, right? If you saw it in a scripted movie, you'd think the writer should go see a therapist. But here's the truth: human trafficking (forcing someone into labor or sex acts against their will) is worth between \$9.5 billion and \$32 billion worldwide-- to pick a random comparison, \$9.5

billion is four times what the entire Burger King chain takes in. Recent stats found 83 percent of sex trafficking incidents in the U.S. involved victims that were U.S. citizens, and nearly half of those were minors -- just like I was. It's estimated that right now 300,000 kids are in this situation or are at risk. Just this past June, the FBI freed 168 kids who'd been sold into sex slavery across 106 American cities. Since 2008, at least 4,000 kids have been freed from similar operations. Six years. So, yeah, my story is as isolated an incident as the existence of Walmart stores.

Some of the victims are runaways, some just have awful parents. All of them are invisible, as far as mainstream society goes. That's how this stuff hides; I was a chameleon good student and industrious worker with various part-time jobs, with a secret life in forced prostitution. That first part was important to my mother -- keeping up appearances, looking like the "good girl."

Nobody ever suspects the parents of an honors student.

So, you want to know how the business works? No? Well, we're going to talk about it anyway ...

This Industry Is Powered by the Internet

My mom had a webcam, and a couple of years after the visits from the "uncles" she decided to take the "business" online. She'd go into chat rooms and talk me up, and that's how I got my work. The earliest webcam shows I remember were when I was around 6 years old, and they began to pick up after my grandmother passed when I was 8 (my grandmother being one of the last people in my life who could have put a stop to it).

There were (and probably still are) these fetishist chat rooms on [removed], where my mom would just go in and start dropping code words to determine if the guy really wanted to pay for my time or if he was just a random pervert. There was a whole system for the discerning customers: "Snow White" meant a dark-haired girl with pale skin; "Sleeping Beauty" meant a blond-haired, blue-eyed girl; "Strawberry Shortcake" meant a redhead; "Oreos" were black or mixed-race girls; "Fortune Cookies" were Asian girls. If that sounds incredibly racist, or downright silly, you're right. No one's accusing the dudes who buy children of being mature adults.

Once interest was established, my mom would move to the private video chat. That's where I'd sit down with a customer and do you know what. The initial talk was free, just a prelude to them deciding whether or not they wanted to rent me. If they didn't, it'd be my fault for not being cute enough. My parents did business this way until I was about 10 or so, both because the chat rooms were being more closely monitored and I was getting "too old" for them (note: abused children hit puberty early).

And then there was [removed], a website that I'm just sure has a whole bunch of legitimate uses but also happened to be the advertising tool of choice for my parental pimps. My mom would actually pose as a sex worker herself, all the while dropping hints and insinuations that made it clear that it was her child she was selling. She would describe herself as "a youthful princess looking for her knight, I'm a Snow White with long flowing hair, and I'd do anything to make my daddy happy." It sounds like it might

be a perfectly legal ad for a "barely legal" woman, or maybe someone looking for a sugar daddy. But those code words let people in the child slave market know what she was really selling.

You Become a Product -- for Life

Like any product, there is a certain level of "quality control." If you are ugly, stupid, deformed, or defiant, you are worth less money. Total control of the "product" is necessary at all times. And if you hit a kid a bunch in the same place, people start to notice, so they got creative to keep their meal ticket intact-ish. For the worst offenses, being locked in a metal box or trunk until you passed out from the heat was a common prescription.

Basically, they needed to keep me in prime selling shape until my mid-teens -- the ultimate goal for girls like me was an arranged marriage. They wanted to sell me before I got too old, and sort of cash out. You know all those lectures you had in school where they talk about how many tens of thousands of dollars it costs to raise a child to adulthood? My parents had the opposite goal -- they'd turned me into an investment.

I was 14 when the first negotiations for a marriage arrangement were on the table. When I was 15, one of the guys they wanted to marry me off to offered \$50k to take me for life. My parents didn't jump at \$50k, either -- a slave like me is worth more money than some small businesses. A pimp can make between \$150,000 and \$200,000 per child per year, according to the Justice Department. Have you noticed yet that many of the people who want to buy children to molest also have lots of money? Damn, this really does just keep getting worse, doesn't it?

Oh, and that guy who offered the \$50K? He withdrew at the last minute when he found an international girl who was cheaper. Yeah, there's a whole world of us out there -- when I was older I met some of the international slaves. One was from Thailand, a couple were from India, two more from Africa. Their cases are similar -- it almost always starts in the family and eventually moves on to family friends and then strangers. The girls I met from Africa were sold straight-up by their parents -- they'd hawk their kids via chat rooms, bragging about their skills and such. Eventually someone bites, and then they work out an international adoption and bring the girl over on that premise.

These people aren't giving a teen a home, they're buying a domestic servant or a living sex toy. The two girls from Thailand were brought over by the same guy. He was a slave trader -- yes, those still exist. He'd get the girls who were ripe and of age. "Hey, you're real poor, I'll take your daughters and make them American citizens and give them visas and food." And then they end up with me, in some dirty truck stop.

"Where the hell are the cops?" you might be asking yourself. I know I did. Well ...

The Authorities Don't Help Us

I am from a small town, and it was a "pretend not to see, don't tell" sort of thing. "She's his kid, he can do what he wants." Plus, I was a step-kid, so the idea was, "She wouldn't even *have* a daddy otherwise!" As if I should be grateful. Redneck logic can lead to good things, like the deep-fried Snickers bar, but it also leads to this kind of nightmare.

But what it comes down to is that nobody trusts children. And that's not generally a terrible idea, because little kids are often liars. But it also means that adults are likely to just assume your incredibly terrifying-to-make confession is a bag of lies, part of some desperate plea for attention. So, any time I'd reach out to someone, they'd just go right to my parents. Over and over again.

When I got a little bit older, the first person I intentionally tried to reach out to was my great-aunt. She was always nice to me, I thought. I tried to tell her, "Mom makes me go places with these men." She listened. And, just like the lady I let it slip to at school, she went right to my mother. "What is all this [Jane] is saying?" And my mom, being cunning, said: "Oh, no, she's just being over-dramatic. She's trying to take attention because I caught her in the house with a boy." Once again, that defused any suspicions. As soon as mom got me home, she burned me... as in literally.

You know how counselors in school made a big show of saying, "If you're ever abused, come to one of us and we promise we can help"? Well, I confessed to my counselor. Want to guess what happened? He didn't go to my mother -- no, he brought in my stepdad and said, "Tell him what you just told me." Which immediately froze me; I couldn't speak. That night was the closest he ever came to killing me.

Note: Canadian schools (like the one you're in) have policies in place, where that sort of thing does not happen. Parents are not contacted without the child/teen's consent. That's precisely because of cases like this.

It's kind of a fanciful story to believe -- a 15-year-old tells you she's being sold, beaten, burned, and choked, and all these people are involved. I don't necessarily blame my counselor for being confused. I barely believe it myself. The community we lived in was already pretty big on corporal punishment, so bruises and cuts were shrugged off as, "She must have been acting out."

"But what about Child Protective Services?" Well, this was out in the boonies, where A) nobody is big on government interfering with family and B) everybody knows everybody else. In my case, the local CPS officer was one of my cousins. She turned her back and just wrote it off as a family secret. The first cop that knew about my plight also happened to get his regular drug fix from my dad, and so he looked the other way.

I was on my own. As far as I knew at the time, the only way out was to orchestrate my own escape.

Escaping Can Take Years, and the Damage Doesn't Go Away

If you're expecting a thrilling story about sneaking out in the dead of night, maybe after first arranging pillows under my blankets to look like I was still sleeping, you'll be disappointed. The way I escaped was I allowed myself to be sold, figuring whoever "owned" me would give me a better situation than what I had going at home.

And then, I had to do it again.

The first man was a guy my own age who said he would marry me and love me. Instead, he controlled every aspect of my life and pimped me out to his friends (I guess a respectful, loving guy probably doesn't go shopping for his partner in the "slave" section of the classifieds). I got away and started sleeping in my car. I ended up in a homeless camp, just to avoid going home to him.

So, having no other options, I literally sold myself -- I put myself on the market via the Internet. At the time I was working under a stage name as a fetish model. I told them I was looking to be a full-time submissive. These are more code words: "full-time" let people know what I was really looking for. Adding the words "make me your slave" and "eternal slave-master" drove the point home.

I got a few responses, and I picked the one that seemed best. But he was a horrible human being (I know, huge surprise there). He paid me \$5,000 upfront for a three-year commitment. In exchange, I got credit cards, clothes bought for me -- whatever I wanted. He was a big six-figure earner, and he wanted a pretty, erudite girl he could take to social functions but who would also shut up and do what she was told. I don't doubt that some of you probably think this sounds like a sweet deal. It was hell. He sharply dictated every detail of my behavior -- everything from how I washed my hair, to the shade of eye shadow I wore, to exactly how much sleep I was allowed, to what exact words I could use.

I stayed for the whole three years, at which point he made it pretty clear that I had no choice in the renewal. But he also insisted I go back to college (again, status symbol), where I met someone very dear. He was nice and didn't want just sex. We spent time together as friends, and I started to develop what I recognize now as genuine love. I hatched an insidious plan, and my owner caught me in bed with my new friend. It shocked the hell out of him, and he ordered me out.

And, just like that, I was free. For the first time in my life, I wasn't someone's property.

It's not an easy adjustment to make -- the hardest part of recovery has been seeing myself as more than chattel. If I burn dinner, I have an immediate panic attack. If I don't please my fiancée enough, I know he'd never ever hit me, but I still feel this sense of, "Oh crap, I'm gonna get it," like an involuntary reflex. That constant need to be useful, to be perfect, it doesn't go away. I suffer from PTSD. I gained what psychologists call "defensive weight" and wore men's clothes for years trying to hide the fact that I was a woman and to seem unappealing.

It has only been within the last year, when I started building healthy relationships, that I have started trying to lose weight, to see myself as pretty, to do what I want within my own life. I've devoted myself to the online business I started in secret years ago and commit myself to doing charity work. Every day

my goal is to defeat "the girl in the mirror" who still bears the scars. Even then, I know that doing this article is putting me at risk -- I'm sure my previous owner still Googles me and tries to find out where I am and what I'm doing. Someone could find this and forward it to my parents. I really don't care at this point. I share this in the hope that I can give others the courage to speak. People need to know that slavery in America never ended, we just got better at hiding it.