

Kristin' Vaughn Story

I am a survivor of sex trafficking. I was trafficked in Virginia and other states from 2002 to 2007. I had a beautiful life growing up. I had an intact, loving, family. Both of my parents worked and were high achievers. There is lots of military service in my family: Both grandfathers, uncles, and multiple cousins are all military. We are very, very much a family who has served, and continues to serve our country, in numerous capacities.

As a child, my parents were told I had “oppositional defiance disorder” and ADHD. And in my teenage years I was diagnosed with mental health issues – ADHD, depression and bi-polar. I also was a “cutter” and engaged in self-harm. Like many teens who were “troubled,” I started experimenting with drugs. Around that time, Oxycontin was plentiful on the streets in the area around where I lived, and I got into it. Even so, I graduated from high school with more than enough credits, was captain of our soccer team, Speech & Debate team, Quiz teams, volleyball and swim teams. I lettered in many activities starting my freshman year and was high achieving in lots of ways.

I started college at 17, and chose a college near D.C., 6 hours away from home. I was very naive to the world, but thought I could just handle everything on my own. I graduated high school on June 8th and started college for the summer sessions on June 16th, 1998. I enrolled in the pre-law track and my life's goal was to be an attorney. Even in elementary and middle school, I remember I “dressed up” as a lawyer for career day. I repeatedly won local, state, and national championships for extemporaneous speaking and speech and debate. I worked hard to make that my life's goal.

And then- my entire world was derailed in an instant.

I was sexually assaulted at a party in college after being dosed with GHB (Gamma-Hydroxybutyric Acid – commonly known as the “date rape drug”). I went to campus security. They blamed it on my drinking at the party. I was a minor at the time but that didn't seem to matter. I went to the campus doctor. It turned out I was pregnant as a result of the rape. The doctor treated me as if it were my fault. She told me I would have to wait until I turned 18 to terminate the pregnancy.

I went to the guys whose party it was and told them what had happened. I was threatened, smacked, and hit. They physically took me to Planned Parenthood* themselves – by that time I had turned 18 – and forced me to have an abortion. I was terrified. I had no friends. I could not tell my parents. I was all alone.

After that, I spiraled down- fast.

I stopped going to classes, stopped eating, stopped even taking showers, could not leave my dorm room, so obviously I didn't keep my grades up. My advisors and the college told my parents to come get me because I could not even function.

They came and got me and then I was at odds for a while trying to figure out what to do, still depressed, but also still hopeful. I got a job at a place where I was learning to be a chef and I thought, “well this is what I will do with my life.” But I wasn't happy – I wasn't feeling good about

myself and my life – the abortion, failing out of college, having to walk away from the educational path for my life's dream - felt like I was failing at life.

It was a perfect storm that created a very vulnerable, unhealed, emotionally and spiritually empty young lady. I moved into my own house and started a new job; I would either walk to work or take the bus every day. I wasn't receiving any services, involved in any recovery community, I had no friends, I was in a new city and new job, I was estranged from my parents and family because the shame and guilt and depression and addiction prevented me from feeling like I deserved to be loved or be in their lives

One day, on the way to work, I met these two girls who seemed very fun loving and caring and I started hanging out with them. At first, it was saying hello to them in passing, out of politeness maybe a few times a week that I saw them. I was starved for love and friends and attention. I was in the most vulnerable place I have ever been in my life.

They offered to smoke a joint with me one day, so we did. And then again. And then again. This very quickly progressed to them coming to my house every day when I got off work. They started bringing me weed, then Ecstasy, then heroin, and then crack. They took me shopping and would buy me all new clothes and jewelry.

Soon after that, I lost my job. That left me with no money for bills. They started paying all of my bills. Pretty soon, it became completely unmanageable- all of the trauma and hurt and addiction and depression and ADHD reared their ugly heads, and I lost my home completely.

All I had left was these two friends. And they just showered me with gifts, and clothes - and also alcohol and drugs – anything I wanted. I found out later that they were paid to recruit me. I don't know if you know anything about cults, but it was kind of like that – it started out with something called “love bombing” – they paid a lot of attention to me and said things like “Oh you're our family, you're our sister – call me sis.” That's what traffickers look for – that vulnerability. I got hooked on dope and eventually I lost my job. Then they said, “Oh, don't worry - you can come live with us” and that was the beginning of the end really. I moved in with them. I didn't understand it at the time, but it was a house of horrors.

They would go out somewhere, I didn't know what they were doing, and come back with all this money. Soon they started urging me to come with them. They wanted me to do what they were doing too. I was so naïve – I didn't understand what was going on. They said, “You've had sex before - well, this is the same except that now you get paid for it which is better.” And I was like, “OK I will try it.”

And I did – I tried it. I was taken all up and down Virginia interstates and later flown around to East Coast major cities and then I said, “Nope, this is not for me,” and I tried to get out, but I couldn't. When I tried to leave, they locked me in the basement with 2 other girls.

They wouldn't let us out ever. We were literal prisoners. They didn't let us out unless it was to “work.” They provided drugs – a lot of drugs, which I took so I didn't feel, didn't have to deal. I used

whatever they gave me and we joked that we were addicts of choice. We chose whatever they gave us so we could check out from our reality.

The only way I escaped from there was because someone came over who knew my parents and he told them I was trapped there. My parents tried to get law enforcement to act, but they wouldn't respond because they said that I must be there voluntarily. So, some family members said, "Enough is enough." They showed up to this literal den and threatened the drug dealers/traffickers both at once and that's how I got out.

From there I went to a place in Nashville called Thistle Farms* which is a 2-year residential program for victims and survivors of trafficking with substance abuse problems and I stayed there for two years and graduated from there in 2009.

During the time I was trapped by the traffickers, I was arrested twice for prostitution. I tried to tell law enforcement what was going on with me, that I wasn't there by choice, that I was being held against my will, but the arresting officers didn't care to hear that I was being forced into that life.

Even though I didn't want to be there, I didn't choose it, I was a victim, the criminal legal system didn't see me that way. Instead, they slapped me with criminal charges that have haunted me ever since. Those two convictions I carried with me everywhere resulted in many closed doors, limited opportunities and kept me shackled to a past that wasn't even my real story to begin with.

By the time I got out I had lots of health problems. I was addicted to drugs, I had had a botched abortion, forced by my traffickers, which led to a lot of reproductive health issues, and eventually made me infertile. I can't have children, which broke my heart because I love children and always wanted to have them.

My traffickers used violence to force me to do what they wanted: at one point they bashed my head and I lost over 75% of my teeth. I had to get implants when I got out.

I also contracted Hepatitis C, STDs, and some other communicable diseases, including MRSA. Finally, I had huge mental health issues, depression, flashbacks, nightmares, hypervigilance, dissociative disorders, all stemming from or definitely exacerbated by the five years I was trafficked.

Today I've been out for 17 years. I have fought for and will continue to fight for victims and survivors. I speak on policy, legislation, and criminal record relief. I run OSINT* (Open-Source Intelligence) teams, and we find and track missing victims. I train on vacatur, health and human trafficking, and survivor inclusion and engagement.

For me, getting out was a gift, and that gift comes with a responsibility. That responsibility is to make sure I do everything I possibly can to make sure this doesn't happen to anyone else.

I will never ever stop fighting the buying and selling of humans.

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