

## Tanya Gould

I met my trafficker when I was still in high school. I was graduating from high school and at the end of the year we had a senior trip. Our trip was to a local amusement park. All my friends had a date, but I didn't. One of my friends knew someone who knew a guy and she set me up. He was very handsome, striking looking, older – he was 28 and I had just turned 18 -- and so I was thrilled because I had been with a lot of knuckleheads my own age. On our first date, he was amazing.

He let me talk – he asked great questions. He got me to open up and I told him everything about me – even intimate details about how I was sexually abused when I was a child from ages 7 to 14 by a relative, and I had sex when I was in high school and had a baby when I was sixteen. He said all the right things – he told me that if he had been there, that wouldn't have happened to me, that he wanted to protect me, keep me safe, treat me as his Queen. He knew all the right things to say to me.

We dated for four months – he doted on me, gave me presents, brought me flowers, took me shopping. We went out every single weekend, sometimes for the whole weekend. He really wined and dined me. He paid for everything, lavishing attention on me, and I realize now as I look back that he began a process of separating me from my family and friends. I was in love and I thought he was in love with me. One day, about four months into the relationship, he sat me down and said that he wanted us to have an amazing life together and to fulfill all our dreams. He had told me that he worked at the Post Office and I thought that's the way he made his money. Now, he told me that his Mom ran a business in which she was a madam – and she took care of girls who wanted to make a lot of money in prostitution. Then he told me that his Mom had given him the business and he saw me as his Queen and partner in his business.

My parents were ministers in a church in our neighborhood. I felt I had already messed up and disappointed them when I was younger and I felt so distant from them and from my friends – in fact by the time he told me what he really did, I felt I only had him in the world. I was in shock when he told me who he really was and how he made his money – but by this time I was totally in love with him. I didn't want to lose him. When I look back now, I see that those four months were spent really grooming me. He said he wanted me to help him run the “business” but he would need me to be out on the street with the girls to know the business inside out. When I objected and said no, he left me and told me to call him.

I was in shock and I missed him – for the next 3 weeks I called, messaged, tried to reach him but he didn't call back. I was young and in love and I felt like I needed him. I was desperate. In order to keep him, I ended up giving in and doing what he wanted to do. He told me that by helping him in his business, I would be helping us save for our wedding, house, and car. Almost immediately after I agreed to help, everything changed. Everyone is different and unique. Pimps focus on who you are as a person and figure out how to break a person – mind, body, and spirit. My trafficker had already broken me in many ways by the time I gave in and told him I would do what he wanted. All the things I thought I had with him rapidly disappeared – all I wanted was what he and I had in the beginning – but now he forced me out onto the street – as one of a stable of girls he held in this “business.”

My trafficker made all the transactions. We would just sit and wait for direction. He had cultivated relationships with businessmen and was able to set up dates with all types of buyers. Buyers were men of all professions including military personnel. They were in the Washington, DC and Northern Virginia area. When approached by military buyers, it was often not just one, but they came in groups. So, it would be one right after another. That would be what we did for that night.

Over the first year, terrible things happened. I was beaten by customers, forced to have sex at gunpoint, raped. He had made a promise to me that he wouldn't hit me, but he beat the other girls in front of me and that hurt and frightened me. After I said I would do what he wanted, he showed who he really was. He was powerful and mean and he was an enforcer. There was a terrible fear all the time in his stable. –You do not mess up. If we had a “problem” it took away from the bottom line which was making money. For instance, he made it clear that we were not to get pregnant. That was our responsibility. We had to make sure we did not have or cause any problems.

Eventually, he began to hit me like the others. I began to feel more helpless and afraid to leave. I was starting to deteriorate. I was physically sick, mentally depressed, I was suicidal. I wasn't getting enough sleep because he (the trafficker) was forcing us out into the street to make huge quotas. When any of us in the stable got robbed or lost money his rule was that we all had to make *double* to make up for the loss.

One night, I lost my money – I don't know how it happened. I got into a car and told the buyer where to go but he didn't listen. I told him again I tried to tell him my pimp is a boxer and he will hurt you. But this guy didn't listen. He drove me to a gravel pit and he pulled out a knife and told me to give him my money. I knew we would all get beaten and be out on the street doing more double time and so I told him I wasn't going to give him my money. He got angry and threatened me. We had a standoff and then a physical struggle. He got on top of me and he was heavy and he overpowered me with the knife at my neck. I thought he was going to kill me. I was still struggling when I heard a tap on the window and a light shining and a Voice out of nowhere said, “*What are you doing?* – you have a son.” I realized if I died, my pimp would have my son and I couldn't protect him. Instantly something changed. It's like that saying in the Bible, “He took me from mirey clay and set my feet upon the rock.” Before that instant, I had felt like the Lord had abandoned me and He was against me. I had felt like He was angry at me and He was punishing me. But in that instant, I simply surrendered. I stopped struggling and gave the money to the guy with the knife and he was gone. Then I was alone in this gravel pit. I didn't have any ID – any money – I didn't know where I was – in Maryland, DC, or Virginia. I was broken and empty and lost. I cried out, “God help me”

A moment later a police officer drove up out of the darkness. He said, “What are you doing? Come here.” I was frightened but something in his voice made me go over. Then he said, “What are YOU doing out here?” as if he couldn't believe that I could be out here in this situation, but he said it with care and concern and through him I just felt the heart of the Father – it felt like that moment where Jesus said, “Those without sin cast the first stone” – then just that moment with Jesus –

and I told the policeman everything, including that my son was in a daycare where all the girls in my pimps' stable took their kids and that I had to find a way there and rescue him. He immediately said,

"I will pay for transportation for you to get your son." And he did. He gave me the money to get him and I just went straight over got my son and that instant left the trafficker for good. He tried to contact me several times after I left. I changed my phone number and other contact information. He sent flowers to my family's house with a note that read, "I'll always know where you are," but I did not respond. Several years later I learned that he had taken the money he got from selling girls and purchased a restaurant. As far as I know, he was never punished for his trafficking.

Now, I work with minors in the Virginia Beach area who have been trafficked. I have a non-profit that helps move those who have been victimized by sexual violence towards self-discovery and their life's purpose. I have worked with two individuals who were trafficked by military personnel.

One was a young lady I met at a medical facility. She was being trafficked by her husband. He was serving in the Army and I learned from her that he forced her to quit school when they got married. He began to sell her to make money while they were stationed in one state and then another. She wanted to finish school and he promised her that when they returned back to their home state, she could, but told her that while they were traveling, she would work for him. He was severely controlling and abusive. When I met her to counsel her, she was afraid of what he could do to her because of his military status. He would keep her in hotels where she would be sold for sex sometimes to strangers, sometimes to other friends of his in the military. By the time I started working with her, she was physically sick, noticeably unhealthy. She was just 19. We talked about her family. He let her call home every so often so her family wouldn't worry about her. She was too frightened to leave her trafficker the day we talked. I gave her my phone number and told her to call me and stay in touch. She would call me when she could, using a new phone number every time. In a few months, she called to let me know that they moved to a new military installation in a state where she had some family members. She escaped one day while her husband was at work and her family flew her back home to her parents. She was afraid to report it while they were together because she didn't trust his Command. She reported to law enforcement authorities and they told her that they would report it since he was in the military and that was protocol.

In another case, a young woman was trafficked by her boyfriend who was in the military. He sold her to his friends, some of whom were also in the military. After much abuse in this "relationship" (which was really a trafficker/victim relationship, not a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship) she left him. After years of abuse, she ended up on drugs, began using sex to purchase drugs, and continued to find herself in abusive relationships. She struggled with addiction. I met her because she was posting ads online selling herself and she was approached by law enforcement. She shared her story with me about how she started. When I met her, she was only 21. Her addiction was stronger than her will to live a different life.

It is critical for military members to understand that the purchase of sex is prohibited in the Uniform Code of Military Justice because it fuels human trafficking. It is also important for

those in the military to understand what human trafficking is and to be able to identify the signs and indicators of human trafficking and respond appropriately when they suspect human trafficking.

Your report could save a life.