

## Theresa Flores

I was a normal every-day girl living in the suburbs. I was part of a nice family. I was a good kid. I got good grades, was a good athlete. But my father was an executive who moved every two years as he got new assignments from his company. One of the moves took us to a Detroit suburb, where I was the new girl – a sophomore in a big high school.

I didn't have any friends, so I was excited when "Daniel" offered me a ride home from school one day. He was handsome, cool, and older, and I was thrilled to be noticed. I thought he was amazing so I trusted him and accepted his invitation. When I got in his brand-new car, he told me he needed to run by his house for a second.

When we got to his house, he invited me in, took me upstairs, and gave me a Coke from the mini frig in his bedroom. After a few minutes, he started kissing me and I felt really dizzy. I had been drugged. I had always known when to tell somebody to stop, but when I told him to stop, he just didn't. He got angry and violent and even though I screamed, there was no one in the house. He raped me. It happened in 15 minutes and it was devastating. I was Catholic and a virgin. The shame was huge. I didn't tell anyone, instead, I kept it a secret and tried to pretend nothing happened.

A few days later, Daniel cornered me in school and showed me pictures of the rape. Apparently, his cousins were hiding in the closet and took photos. He told me that if I didn't do what he said he would publish the photos and ruin my family. I was frightened that my Dad would lose his new job.

That is how my nightmare began – for the next two years Daniel sold me around Detroit. It turned out that he was part of a sophisticated gang of traffickers who sold me to powerful men who sexually exploited me in their own homes. During the time I was trafficked, my grades fell from A's to C's and D's, I dropped out of track, and was falling asleep in school. I also went from being happy-go-lucky to depressed, sullen, and silent. My parents and teachers knew something was wrong but attributed it to teenage angst.

I escaped from my traffickers only when, after two years, my family moved again. Because the traffickers were well-connected in our community, I never told my parents or anyone else what happened because I feared retaliation. I wish I had told someone because the traffickers continued to traffic other girls. They were never prosecuted.