

Tina Frundt

From the age of 9 years old, I was a victim of child sex trafficking. My parents abandoned me when I was young, and I was placed into foster care. My foster mother lived in the “projects” in Chicago, Illinois. Social workers never visited and maintenance repairs were never conducted, so I never said anything because I didn’t think anyone would respond. My foster mother traded us for drugs. I was forced to go to people’s houses and perform sex acts on adult men. I didn’t know what to do to stop my foster mother from forcing me to endure rape after rape. Because of the culture in the projects, I grew up viewing the police and the government in a negative way and thus didn’t trust them.

A few years later, a family adopted me despite the social worker’s attempts to portray me as a “troublemaker” and not a good fit. I was finally out of foster care and in a stable home. But when I was 13, I met an older guy (he was 25) who lived in our neighborhood. He was nice to me and gave me rides to school when my parents were unable to do so. He told me that he was adopted too, but then given away. I bonded with him and trusted him. He worked on my mind to make me distrust my new parents. Unfortunately, none of what he said was true.

One night, I got into an argument with my parents about staying out past 9:00 p.m. I thought they were being unreasonable and I called the guy from the neighborhood and told him about the argument. He came right over and picked me up. I thought we would drive around a bit, but he said he needed to go to Cleveland, Ohio where his family’s business was located. At the time, I thought I was running away from home, but I soon found out he kidnapped me.

When we arrived in Cleveland, everything changed. I was locked in a room and forced to conduct sex acts on between 5 and 15 men. The guy that was so nice to me turned out to be a pimp, from a family of pimps. The first night I got there, all these men came in and out of my room – I realized later that the trafficker was “seasoning” me. After that, I was taken with several other girls to private parties, to military parties, to police parties, to hotels, and to legal strip clubs where we were sold to make this guy money. I was 14 years old. I was in plain sight, but no one helped me. No one noticed the bruises on my body or an older man constantly by my side. I felt invisible and worthless.

One night, when my pimp wasn’t looking, I snuck a copy of a key in an effort to escape with other girls. He caught me and beat me with an iron rod. Years passed. Then, when I was getting sick and not able to perform, he drove me back to my neighborhood and dumped me in a place where I was arrested and charged with prostitution. This was the beginning of a long life in prostitution. I went from one vicious pimp to another. I ended up in the DC area, where we were on Beauregard Street in Alexandria, Virginia, across from a DoD office building. Military service members and DoD civilian employees often bought me from one of my pimps – mainly on pay days when they were flush with cash. It is a longer story to tell how I finally healed, left the situation, and founded Courtney’s House, the only African American-run, survivor-run program that works with boys and girls who are trafficked. What happened to me is still happening today and we need your support to stop it.