

How prostitution chose me

by Nekome, a survivor of prostitution

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They say prostitution is a choice? How did I choose prostitution? I didn't choose prostitution, it chose me. Just as child sexual assault and neglect had chose me. I was not a willing participant, but lured into a life I saw as my only option. The words choose means to select from a number of possibilities; pick by preference. Choose is a term loosely used when referring to woman in prostitution. Most of the time poverty, ignorance, or pimps lure women into prostitution by selling them dreams. Most of the time a lifetime of poverty plays a role in the choice.

My story is about a childhood cut short, quickly interrupted with sex, drugs, neglect and mental abuse. Some people inherit money, ethics, values or property from their family. I inherited generations of ignorance. My grandmother and mother were uneducated, neglected and abused. Early on the torch was passed down to me. My story is about a child who knew before she could reach the tall shelf in the kitchen, that my greatest asset was my body. My story is about the little voice inside me that whispered *you deserve more* as I lay on my back counting dots on the ceiling pretending I wasn't being molested. They say that a baby that gets no hugs or affection can die. But what they don't talk much about is the babies that do live. That is my story. I am the child that did not die.

The first trick I turned was a week after my mother died. I had just moved out of a battered women's shelter into the home my mother was renting before she died and if I wanted to stay there I needed to pay rent immediately. I had a two year old baby to feed, no home, no car and I was presented with the choice to make money or not eat. I answered an ad on Craig's list for online models. I had an eighth grade education and a learning disability. At the time I could barely fill out a job application and I had been refused work at Mc Donald's because I couldn't work the hours and afford childcare.

In an instant I was asking myself, would you prefer to sell your body or prefer to live in poverty? Prostitution was introduced to me, disguised as online modeling. It misrepresented itself as a lifeline for change. It was hard for me to be selective when I felt I was sinking. I was desperate, vulnerable

and felt like I was drowning. When I searched for a lifeline I grabbed the first thing that came my way. At first when the money started to touch my hand I was convinced I had found my place in the world, my power. But quickly the money went through my hands and right into the pocket of my “boyfriend” or the percentage fee I had to pay to work incall [a kind of prostitution where the pimp has a cellphone and sends women to tricks’ houses]. The only way my boyfriend would accept the way I was making money was if he was the accountant. So he began to manage and manipulate my money. He paid our bills, and tried to protect me. I had no say in how the money was spent. Most nights I didn’t even bother to count the hundreds I would make. No matter how hard he tried to watch my back, he couldn’t come to appointments with me and many times his protection attempts failed. Not only was I subjected to humiliation, assault and robbery, the emotional impact hit me hard. At one incall place, the pimp who ran it didn’t care what the clients did to us as long as we paid our fee.

Although I was miserable and couldn’t spend my own money, I convinced myself I was powerful. Looking at me from the outside you would have thought I had it all and was happy. But the truth was, I had an eighth grade education and had never even seen a hundred dollar bill till I started working as a prostitute. I began to help support my grandma, my cousins, my boyfriend’s extended family and his seven children. I was a machine, a robot, having sex sometimes up to ten times a day or night. I worked incall many years. I felt like I held the world on my shoulders. It was Christmas, birthdays, and Fourth of July for everybody but me. There was a time when I convinced myself I didn’t care that I was a prostitute. I had given up on my dream to work with children. I told myself I was good at what I did and I couldn’t see myself ever being more than what I had become. I had started having sex at ten years old; I knew how to please men, even if it killed me. But at night when I came home, I showered I scrubbed and lathered to try and get the streets off me. I hated being touched by tricks. Each time I did a call I felt as if I was being raped again. Working incall I never knew what my day would bring. My best friend was raped in the room next to me and I never heard a sound. The trick muffled her cries and walked out like nothing was wrong. Every day I would try to drown out the thought that I might be next. My mantra was get your money and get them out, but I was dying inside.

Now that I am out I have not been able to escape the effect my past has had on me. Years after I getting out of prostitution the pain stays. I still sleep with the light on. It hurt my soul that teachers, doctors, and family men paid me for sex. It haunts me to see girls being pimped and to see the men that buy them. It changed the way I look at people. Seeing men secretly pay me for sex then go back to their families made me lose respect for myself and for most men.

Everybody close to me knew I was a prostitute and not one time did *anybody* say no to the money I was handing out. It got to the point that I couldn't do an appointment without being so numb with alcohol or Xanax that I couldn't even feel my own body as I was being touched. No family member ever said *you shouldn't be doing this, you are better than this*. The pressure of having to pretend I liked the sex and the fear that I might be killed some day got to be too much for me. One night when I was ready to meet up with a trick my daughter looked at me and said, "mommy, where are you going? You look so pretty." I looked at my daughter and I asked myself the same question, *where are you going*. I told myself, you are better than this and I made a decision to quit. When I quit I lost everything I had, my home, my car and I had to start from scratch.

Once again the word choose means to select from a number of possibilities or to pick by preference. Here is a choice to think about. Which arm would you like me to chop off, your right or left? Is that really a choice? Would most of us choose to have the left hand chopped off since most of us are right handed? When real alternatives do not exist, it looks like people are making bad choices. *What are the basic rights that all women and children should have so that they never have to make the "choice" to prostitute?*