



## Stolen Innocence

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The Story of Alma Julianna Flores Martínez and Karla Nayeli Martínez Flores

(ALMA) Good day, we are Karla and Alma, we are cousins. We live in Tepetlixpa, State of México, it is a small town located on the edge of the highway leading to Morelos, where everyone knows each other. It is a busy commercial route.

Today, we want to share our story. One that started as a tragedy, but has ended with the evidence that there is still love and kindness in the world.

(KARLA) On the 27th of January, 2011, a holiday in our town, we were walking back from the nightly festivities, which I had attended without the permission of my parents, when a pair of truckers grabbed us and drugged us. They hid us in their truck. We woke up confused; we were terrified, we had no air to breathe, or space to move. These men tried to sell us in several bars, Yasmin, a madam, bought us in Santiago Acozac, Puebla. They kidnapped us as sexual slaves. As a "welcome gift," I was raped by 23 men, being a 14 year old virgin. Sadly, in many countries truckers are involved in the business of trafficking men, women, and children.

It is customary for adolescents to make decisions without measuring the consequences. Going to that party without the permission of my parents put me in a vulnerable and dangerous position. My parents set boundaries for me because they wanted to protect me, but to me they seemed ridiculous. Today I want to share this message with young people that sometimes feel annoyed with their parents: If your parents take care of you, let them protect you, they love you, as it is their job to keep you safe.

(ALMA) They separated us with the intention to have more control over us. They took me to the Madam's brother. He received me with deceiving messages that convinced me that he loved me and cared for me. When my heart was seduced, he started grudging me and physically abusing me to keep me subdued. Soon after that, I was sent back to Puebla.

Every day, the Madam would insult, hit, and humiliate us. She would inject us with drugs and forced us to drink alcohol, so we could "last the night." For more than four months, we were used in different clubs. Later we learned that Yazmin, the Madam, had also been a victim of abuse from the time she was nine years old. Sadly, the bitterness that grows in one's heart when your rights and dignity are continuously violated, leads many to become victimizers themselves, sometimes becoming even worse than those who abused them. It is their way of taking vengeance against the injustice inflicted on them.

As you can see, there are many different ways to subject a person into human trafficking, in our case: kidnapping, force, trickery and threats. All of these methods that destroy human dignity.

(KARLA) The pain that I felt at being there made me want to desire death, I saw death as my only way out of that hell, and I would ask God that the substances that they injected me with would take my life. Today I am grateful to be alive.

(ALMA) Many people ask me why we did not escape, why we did not ask for help; the reason is simple, besides the physical pain produced by 20 daily rapes, beatings, excess of drugs and alcohol, the terror also paralyzes you. One day they got us together to let us know that if there ever was a police raid we needed to say that we were there of our own free will, and that no one forced us to do any of the things we did. We tried to resist, but they very calmly told us that we were not being asked, we were being ordered, while they held a pistol to my cousin's head.

They gave us instructions on how to do anything that the clients asked for, it did not matter how deprived it could be. The client was always right. I would think to myself, How is it possible that a man the age of my father, or even grandfather is touching me and forcing me to have sex with him? How is it that these men beat me, when my own father never raised a hand to me? Where is my family, don't they love me any more, why don't they look for me?

(KARLA) We would work very long hours while putting up with clients that did not care if we were little girls. At the end of the day we were taken to a house where several men and Yazmin would watch over us.

Later, after witnessing the death of an 8 year girl, who had been raped by the same 23 men as me, I decided to run; I looked for a police car seeking for help, but the police officers returned me to the Madam, and were offered my free service for their effort.

We were given dirty water to drink, I was always thirsty so one day I stole a bottle of water. Yasmin found out, and asked who had done it. A 17 year old girl quickly took the blame, and was beat to death. When she lay there dying, she asked me to escape again, so I could tell the world what was going on there. The memory of her giving her life for me, motivates me to move forward. Her name was Estrella, and it was her love for me, that chased away the fear.

Once more I escaped and I walked until I found a young women, whom I begged for help. She drove me to the next town. There I bumped into a group of young men who saw me crying and after hearing my story invited me to spend the night in their home. They gave me shelter and food, all the while, respecting my privacy. The next day they bought me a bus ticket to Mexico city. There I spent two days begging for money so I could get passage to my town.

When I got to my town the people saw me and started taunting me, and yelling out insults at me, I felt embarrassed by the way I was dressed and I started doubting weather I should go home. I remembered that my parents loved me, and even if my mother scolded me, I knew she cared for me. The hope of their love drove me home. There I was received with open arms and tears. My parents had lost everything looking for me. When my uncle got the news of my return, he asked me about my cousin, we went to the authorities, and they acted immediately rescuing several girls as well as my cousin.

Months went by, and we received the care and comfort of our families, though the stigma of our ordeal followed us every day. We were not allowed to return to school, because the principal believed we would be of bad influence to the other students. We have been empowered by knowing Rosi Orozco, who has always driven us to stay strong.

Today, our purpose is to help other women living in slavery that might be a few blocks away from home, who do not have the courage to return, because of fear and shame. Today we are here to declare a message of hope. Yes there are people that love you, that are looking for you, and want to help you restore your dignity. We tell you that you are valuable, and that it does not matter what you have been through - Love casts away fear, and gives you the strength to get up and keep fighting.