

First of all, I want to genuinely thank each and every one of you for the opportunity of letting me share my story in the hopes that something that has gone on for far too long will be recognized and totally eradicated from our society.

I was a typical teenager, came from a loving Christian family and had lots of close friends But one bad decision would ultimately change my life forever. I became addicted to drugs and the one person I thought was helping me break free of my addiction was in fact a trafficker of young women for the sex trade.

It seems strange to even use the term “Modern- day slavery” in our country, but It went from something I knew next to nothing about, to the way I was forced to live my life for seven years. I knew of slavery from what my history classes taught me, it ended. Unfortunately, for many people today, this is just not the case. This is a way of life they are forced to live, how to think, when/where to eat, sleep and work. Slavery is alive and well today. Modern Day slavery, or as my pimp referred to it, “white slavery,” is simply a way for monsters to make a very good living.

Throughout the seven years of being trafficked, I - along with other young women - were used as a commodity by one pimp and were bounced around from Myrtle Beach, SC; Miami, FL; Houston, TX, San Diego, CA; New Orleans, LA; Scottsdale, AZ; Chicago, IL; Columbus, OH and Denver, CO - for the sake of making money to enable our pimp to live the lavish lifestyle he wanted to live. We were used to glamorize and entice more young girls to ultimately feel a sense of initial comfort, only to be brainwashed into a dark cult of servitude. We were trained

for one thing, to make him money. He was and still is, the most manipulative, calculated person I've ever encountered.

My heart bleeds for the victims that are still under the control of others, living similar lives. I was fortunate in that I had a loving and caring family and close friends who welcomed me back with open arms, helping me to find my new normal. This was all done with the assistance of A-21. Unfortunately, so many other victims are not so fortunate as I, coming from backgrounds that include abuse and neglect and may fall through the cracks of what limited social services may be available to them. With the absence of a strong support system, these survivors more likely than not, will find themselves back in similar or even worse situations.

If you're not familiar with A-21, let me just tell you about what they are doing worldwide:

- They've been operating for 8 years, currently working in 10 countries directly with survivors of trafficking across four continents, specifically USA, Thailand, Greece, Bulgaria, Ukraine and South Africa.
- They have provided direct assistance to countless victims, some victims being as young as four years old.
- They have assisted victims not only in sex trafficking, but in forced labor, forced begging, domestic servitude and organized theft rings.
- They have a comprehensive after care to bring the survivor all the way from the point of rescue/escape to independent living. This includes full medical care, trauma rehabilitation programs, education support and social enterprise opportunities.

- A-21 also offers legal representation for their survivors and have seen significant sentences on human trafficking across Greece, Ukraine, Bulgaria and South Africa so far.

Without A-21, I would not have been able to walk this road to healing. Without the constant support and dedication of A-21 I'm not sure exactly where I would be today. Cara Lee Murphy, who is the US aftercare manager has gone above and beyond to ensure that my past doesn't define my future. She continues to push me forward and to excel in whatever endeavor I choose. Without her, I could have just been another girl forgotten.

Today I want to stress the importance of education on human trafficking - it does exist and not only in third world countries. It is a way of life for criminals in the heartland of America. I owe my recovery to the A-21 campaign, which is not only for abolishing and educating our society on modern day slavery, but for the recovery of victims such as myself throughout the entire process. And when I tell you that it's a process, IT IS A SLOW, DAY-BY-DAY, PROCESS. Coming from a situation like I was in and getting thrown back into "normal" society, you have to find your new normal.

Now that we know the truth about human trafficking, we cannot turn our backs and pretend that this problem does not exist. Therefore, I cannot express to each of you in these few minutes, how important it is that we - concerned citizens, educators, legislators, non-profits, and law enforcement - educate our youth and communities on what human trafficking is, how pimps work and who they profile. It's a dirty secret in our society, but we can prevent others from falling prey to these predators. This was something I was never taught. This is a cancer, growing stronger each day and it is up to each of us to do our part to stop it.

I encourage you to take a serious look at this problem and do everything you can in your power to assist agencies like the A-21 Campaign. Thank you for your time and God bless you.