

I remember the first time someone identified what had been happening to me for most of my life. I had sat down for lunch with the pastor of my church and she said, "Tell me your story."

Honestly, no one had ever asked me that before. No one had taken such an interest in my life. But she cared enough to ask, so I described to her what a member of my family had been doing to me since I was a toddler. She sat quietly for a moment, took a breath, then said, "So you were sex trafficked?"

I shook her off. That wasn't what had happened to me. I hadn't been kidnapped. When my abusers took me somewhere, it wasn't secretly in the dark of night. No one kept me locked in a basement, cut off from the world. That's what happens in the movies. *That's* what trafficking is. Not a little kindergartener in light-up sneakers. Not a little girl in princess-themed pajamas curled up in her bed under Winnie-the-Pooh sheets. No, I wasn't trafficked. I was, in my own words, a "child prostitute."

But her words resonated with me. Could I have really been trafficked? Do little girls in quaint midwestern towns get trafficked? And by a member of their own family? I began researching what sex trafficking is by definition.

Transportation is not required for trafficking to occur.

Many child trafficking victims are trafficked by family members.

Physical restraint is not a requirement for trafficking, either.

Over and over I read the words "there is no such thing as a child prostitute." I read legal definitions and articles by nonprofits and survivor stories. Piece by piece, I began to understand that my friend was right. I *had* been trafficked.

With that knowledge, I began to reach out for help in ways I hadn't before. I began to connect with resources specific to trafficking. I began to build a community around myself of other survivors and of service providers that saw me. Finally, my life began to make sense. Finally, I had the words to identify what had been happening to me for so long.

And it was all thanks to my friend. With the understanding of what was happening to me came a desire to escape it and the knowledge that escape was possible. My friend knew what trafficking was and, because of her knowledge, I was identified as a trafficking victim and given the information I needed to escape.

My story isn't unique, unfortunately. With the identification of trafficking victims below 1%, most people in my position are never given the opportunity to escape. There are so many people out there just waiting to have conversations like I had with my friend, a conversation I didn't know I was waiting for. A conversation that saved my life.

Commented [1]: Okay, edited! Let me know what you think.

Commented [2]: I think these edits are great!

Commented [3]: I feel like this could almost be listed out, with each point/sentence having its own line instead of in one paragraph.

Commented [4]: Like this?

Commented [5]: This is great.

Commented [6]: Both "over and over" and "piece by piece" have a similar structure, but I feel the repetition is a little close together. I wonder if you could add something between these two sentences to help break up that repetition.

Commented [7]: Better?

Commented [8]: Perfect!

Commented [9]: Really strong ending!