

LEE'S STORY

“You come to accept that you will die on the street”

My name is Lee and I want to talk about the violence women experience and witness when they are involved in the world of prostitution. I am a survivor of prostitution. I worked the street for almost eight years and have been off the street now for a little over four years. Although I would never go back, the last few years have been very difficult for me. I am still struggling to deal with the emotional and physical consequences of this lifestyle. I will never be able to fully forget, or understand completely, much of what I went through.

I realize there was never a time when I had no fear.

The violence on the street is incredible. Through the years, I have been raped, sodomized, had my life threatened, been beaten and robbed by “bad dates”. On the street I have had knives held to my throat and guns pointed at my head while being forced to perform various sex acts. I’ve been thrown naked from moving vehicles and left for dead in the middle of winter outside of town after being beaten and raped. I have cleaned up my friends and taken care of them after they experienced similar things. The worst “bad date” I ever had happened in Vancouver. I went on a double date with another girl and when it was all over, they had murdered her.

I was meant to have been killed alongside, but through pure luck, or perhaps a guardian Angel, I made it out alive.

I do not understand, and I struggle with the fact that my life was spared when others were not. In total, I have lost seven friends to murder. There are many others I knew only to see and there are many others I did not know at all. But the one thing that forever haunts me is that in so very many ways, they were exactly like me. So I feel compelled to come and talk-to be a voice for girls who have been silenced by murder and to be a voice for the girls who are still out there today. A RCMP officer once said that being a prostitute puts you at a higher risk for a homicide than anything else does in the world. That’s a pretty scary realization when you think about where these girls come from, how old they are, and who they really are.

These are girls who have made some bad choices, or have been forced into them, usually by pimps, and who no longer see any other way. Although it’s hard to explain, you become addicted to prostitution itself: addicted to the freedom, the ruthlessness, the power and the danger, and the recklessness of it all. To be addicted

to this kind of danger is very scary. Over time, you come to accept that you will die on the street. You understand and are even not fearful of the fact that you will probably die a very violent death. I was there. I remember that way of thinking vividly, to have no fear. Now that I am in counseling and dealing with street-related issues, I realize there never was a time when I had no fear. My fear had been hidden behind a hard and cold wall of anger. The girls on the street never start out that way. They are young, scared, naïve. They turn in to tougher, more brutal women through the violence they experience at the hands of “bad dates” and pimps. After all, prostitution is not about sex; it’s about power and control. And in this world, it’s fight or simple be eliminated. You do become tougher with trauma.

But underneath all of this, they are simply girls who are scared and feel trapped in this lifestyle. And all of this can be healed.

It’s a hard road to recovery and sometimes you have to take two steps back before you can take on forward, but the more understanding and help we received from others in the community, the better. We can all work together to stop the cycle of violence, to help stop the cycle of prostitution. There are at least four agencies in the city dealing with prostitution: Streetworks, Crossroads, Safe House, and Kindred House. They have been a big part of my recovery and are instrumental in helping girls off the street. They are always in need of support, so if you can, please help them.

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