



Survivor Voices: When Does it End?

When does it end? Who will really blame me if I decide to give up? After all I have endured in the past years, I don't think anyone would care. Or is it me that's just asking for too much? After all, we all have our demons that we're fighting. Well I still think that we shouldn't have to fight for some things, things like family. I have not only suffered but also paid for the decisions of other people that are supposed to be family.

In 2018, I thought I really had a chance to finally have the birth of my jewel. Oh, finally I'm going to be happy with my baby! I had this amazing life planned, I believed in God again and there was hope. "What could ever go wrong with this precious gift that God has given me?", I thought to myself. For a very long time I was truly happy, nothing else mattered. The birth of my son made me think I wasn't cursed, that I could live a normal life and just be happy. I was truly happy.

2020, my world came crashing down with the pandemic and the lockdown. My son was always sick. The thing that brought me joy suddenly became my nightmare; I could not sleep at night. I was scared that if I slept, my son might disappear. The fear of losing my son slowly broke me until I hit rock bottom. Suddenly, I was trapped again in my past. I became a prisoner in my own thoughts and everything changed for me. This time it was the worst because, even though I wasn't happy I still needed to do my number one job - being a mother. I was constantly in battle with myself. The hope was lost. I was alone, no family, no friends. It was me versus me.

There was still light. I tried to be strong for my son, who not only loves me but also tells me every morning "Mummy I love you". But it wasn't enough. I was already gone. I kept thinking that if I wasn't so stubborn, I wouldn't be alone; if I had just listened to my aunt my life would have been better, if not perfect. If I'd listened, I wouldn't have had to leave home and suffer everything that happened to me in Libya...some things that I can never bring myself to say, things that will go to my grave.

I couldn't concentrate. I wanted to end it all but I couldn't bear to leave my precious baby. I had different thoughts. Every morning I wake up and put a smile on my face with a heavy heart. When I look in the mirror I can't recognise myself. I became ugly, "who is going to want me now", I just didn't care about me anymore. I told myself my life had ended. All I need to do now is raise my son. I can't possibly fail at parenting. Well, it wasn't as easy as I thought it would be.



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I was living in Italy before I moved to Germany. While living in Italy nothing really changed, the only thing that changed was that I wasn't with family. My madam was the worst because with my family I was able to run, but with her it was different. She kept reminding me of the oath we took and that I would die if I didn't do as she said. And I wasn't the only one; I met some girls there too. The only way was to sell our body for money.

Sleeping with a man wasn't new for me, but I didn't think I would need to sell my body for money. It was home all over again but, at least there I didn't have to sell my body - it was always rape. Until I came to Europe, I had never slept with a man because I wanted to. So I started working... I mean, I saw other girls doing it and also she (the madam) promised me that after paying her back the money she spent to bring me to Europe then the oath wouldn't have any effect anymore...

I started following the girls to the street. I kept paying what I owed, but we started having problems when she (the madam) kept collecting 600 EUR every month for food, house rent and the road where we stood to work. Sometimes she forbade us from eating, just because we didn't bring enough money home; sometimes she beat us, poured water on us and made sure we didn't have any friends.

I was getting used to my new life, until I went to work one day and was raped at gun point. When my stepfather raped me, he didn't just take my pride and destroy my self-esteem. This was different: death was staring right in my face for the first time in my 20 years of existence and I didn't want to die.

Not only did I get pregnant again but she gave me medicine to remove the pregnancy; she forced me to go back to working after 3 days. But I wasn't having it, so I just left the house and stayed out in the train station until evening before I went back home. It wasn't long before she found out; it was war, but I was ready for anything. I had got a friend that kept telling me to go to the police but he didn't understand why I didn't go. I was scared because of the oath they made me take. I was on the street for days. I didn't tell my friend.



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“I didn't want to ask for help. Everyone that has helped in my life always finds a way to exploit me. When fall came, I wasn't going to die of cold. I finally told my friend who took me to his house. It wasn't long until I fell in love with him. I finally got to sleep with a man because I wanted to but then it wasn't how I hoped it would be. It felt like a chore. The near-death experience kept haunting me but he was understanding. He kept trying to help me. Everything was really great until the money stopped coming in. He started to see me as a liability. He was always angry. I didn't know what to do. I'd never been in a relationship before. I wanted to help but there was nothing I could do; I wasn't going back to being a prostitute. He kept saying I was selfish because I refused to go to the street. Sometimes his words cut so deep that I would cry for days. Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse, my madam started calling him and threatening that she was going to kill us both if I didn't come back and pay her her money. The same person that told me to go to the police to report my madam all of a sudden didn't say we should go to the police. Before the pregnancy we talked about our future, how we were going to leave Italy to somewhere no one could reach us. All he wanted now is for me to get rid of the pregnancy.

One day he came home; his face was red, he was so angry. He told me that my madam called his mom. He was leaving town and didn't know when he was coming back. I just packed my bags and left. That was the last time I saw him until after I had my precious baby.

When I left there was nowhere to go. I was sleeping in a park. It was hard with the pregnancy, no money, I kept going to the police to tell them I didn't have a place to stay, they kept asking me to come back. I just got tired of going. No food, no money and no place to sleep. Once again I found myself selling my body to raise money to leave Italy. I was able to raise some money and decided I was going to Germany. That's the second best decision I have ever made.

In Germany, I was staying in a camp and one of my roommates talked about SOLWODI. I finally got an appointment. Ever since, SOLWODI has been in my life - through the birth of my son until now. SOLWODI does not only help you integrate but they are a community that really cares for you. They've helped me in ways I cannot begin to explain, I know they're the reason I'm still standing and breathing. There, a few years ago, I met a lady working for SOLWODI, Veronika. I finally got to know that everyone mattered.

Veronika, she has been there for me. I know she just thinks she's doing her job but for me she's been a mother, a sister and a friend. I don't know what I would have done without her. The thought of letting her down has kept me going. She has done a lot for me. When I met her, for the first time, I was able to talk about the things that have happened to me. She was the first person that really listened to me without judging me or blaming me. There isn't so much she can do, as the damage has cut so deep and I see myself fighting demons that won't die.

“I don't know what's going to happen in the future but I'm ready to triumph. I've come too far to quit now even though I'm really tired of fighting. I know I'm not alone. I have my precious son. That is more than enough reason for me.

I know the new phase won't be easy but I'm ready for whatever comes. I can finally answer the question “When does it end?”. I believe it ends when we stop being scared. I'm done being a prisoner of my past, I'm breaking free this time, I mean it. My past does not define me.



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