

Triple Points addresses different perspectives on one topic: from parents, teens and a professional.



Human Trafficking

Painful Stories

Lauri L. Burns, founder of The Teen Project, Inc., asked three clients — a mom and two teens — to share their experience with Your Teen. Burns, teen expert and former teen prostitute, dedicates her life to youth in crisis.

Parent 1

By Lauri L. Burns



I was 19-years-old when I got into prostitution. This could not have been predicted; from the outside, my life looked really normal.

I grew up in a Jewish home in Long Island, New York. I could read and speak Hebrew and had a bat mitzvah at 13, as expected. I took singing lessons, played the viola and was gifted in math and English. My mom was a part-time dental assistant, and my dad was an airline pilot. We lived in a place called Old Bridge Estates, in a fabulous big house on a hill. We always had cleaning people and everything we ever needed on a material level.

Looking back, though, I was prime for prostitution from the start. You see, behind the closed doors of my home, things were different than they looked. My dad had a very bad childhood

and was still a very angry man. When I turned five, my father began physically abusing me, and I became skilled at mentally numbing myself to the beatings.

I began hitchhiking when I turned 13. Hitching gave me a sense of control that I lacked at home, and to tell you the truth, I loved it! I felt free and independent. My mom moved us to California to get away from my dad when I was 15, and a few girls and I hitched from California to the Colorado River. It felt powerful! I can still remember getting out of that last car when we arrived at the river—wow, we'd made it! That only fueled the fire.

I was 19 when I decided to walk out on the street. I had gotten pregnant, had a baby and was broke. I thought to myself, "Look, you've been hitching forever, so you can do this— maybe someone will offer you some money. If you don't want to, you don't have to... you can just do it like a test. If you feel weird, do nothing and just

hitch back home."

I went to the street known for prostitution and stuck my thumb out. I took the first deal that came my way. Over the next few days, I went from being starving poor to making about \$120 hour. I felt powerful! I could make all the money I wanted! I could successfully block from my mind how I was earning my money. I just focused on the money, the money... and eventually, getting out.

Forward three years later: I was dying from drug addiction and had been in too many terrifying situations to mention. At 23, two gunmen beat me and left me for dead in the woods; a stranger saved my life, and I am forever grateful.

Today, I spend every waking hour reaching out to girls in need. I believe my life was saved to save the others left behind. I have fostered 30 teen girls and 11 homeless girls. My story and the stories of some of the young ladies I have helped are in my book, *Punished for Purpose*.

Seventy-five percent of the proceeds go to the precious young victims that continue to fall into this trap.

My 41 daughters have given more to me than I ever could have given them. I am thankful to have walked before them, if only to be the one chosen to find them and bring them home. My own daughter graduated from Columbia University's School of Social Work in 2010. Inspired by her (then 17) sisters, she couldn't have chosen a different path.

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