
*P.S.
There's Hope*



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Destination: Greece

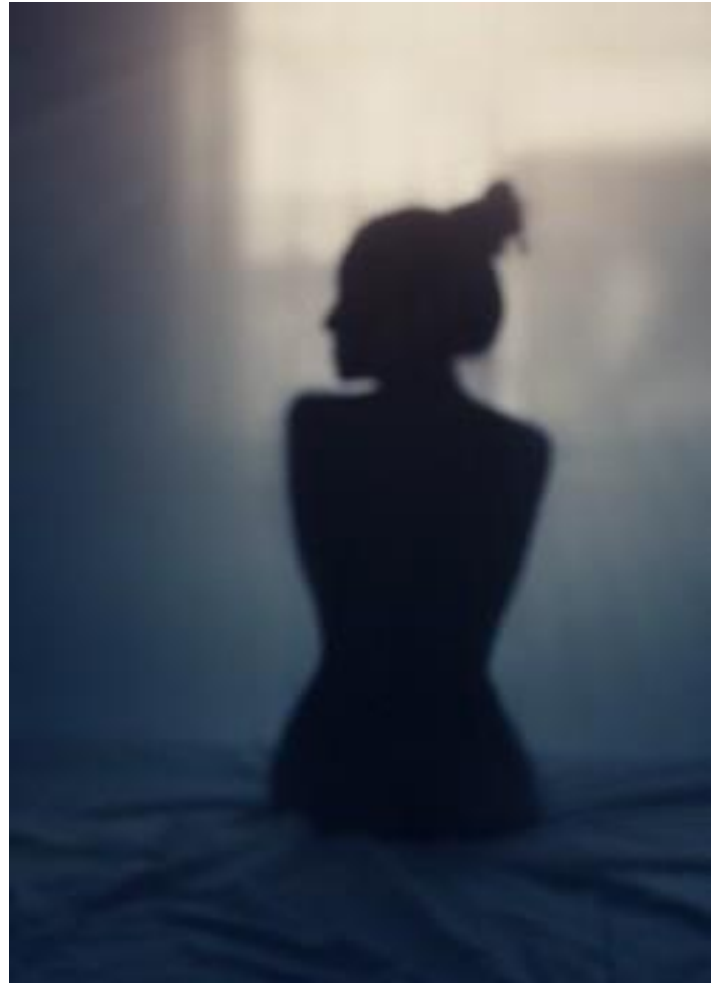
Greece is known for its beautiful beaches, gorgeous coast, and delicious food. But is there more to Greece than meets the eye?



Among the Ruins

Beautiful beaches, great food and friendly people. This is what most people imagine when they think of Greece. But they do not see what lies in the shadows, they do not see the pain. A place that is usually thought of as a dream paradise and a sought-after vacation destination is the same place many young women lose their identity, their trust and their strength. Your dream has become their nightmare.

Greece is known as a transit and destination country due to its prime location and economic decline. It is considered the “gateway” to the European Union and because it is surrounded by countries emerging from authoritarian regimes it has caused an influx of migrants traveling there for a better life, brought there under false pretenses such as good jobs or arranged marriages. With the economy poor and the unemployment rate high, some are even sold by their parents to supplement income for the families.



Human Trafficking in Greece

It is estimated that 20,000 women and children are trafficked into and through Greece each year with the average age being 13, but these are only estimates. It is thought to be even as high as 40,000.

Greece has remained an attractive location for traffickers because little has been done to investigate or prosecute these organizations. They use fear, drugs, religious means and threats to loved ones to intimidate and overpower these women and children. The continued economic decline has made for scarcity of employment, which gives these predator's even more power to control these women. The government and court systems are so backed up that it can take 5-10 years for convictions, which allows these networks to fall back into the shadows and continue these atrocities.



Source Photo: www.safoundation.com
Servants Anonymous



Big Idea

I want to travel to Athens, Greece to volunteer with Community House Damaris to understand the resiliency of the human spirit and share hope with survivors of abuse abroad and at home.

At the same time, it will be an opportunity for me to grow stronger, because my journey into this difficult topic will not begin in Greece.

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In fact, it started right here at home.



My Story

My childhood was similar to most: I had a good family, a good life and a happy home. I came from a large family which was very open, warm and loving. We all got together to celebrate every holiday and every birthday. I played Little League, and my parents were highly involved and supportive of our youth activities. The women in my life have always been strong and independent and that influenced me and made me dream of being that way too.

6 Somewhere in the midst of all this happiness came a predator from the shadows of a normal Suburban home. This was someone I was supposed to be able to trust. Someone no one ever suspected. I was subjected to things and exploited in ways I wish I could forget. From that moment on, sadness, fear, and shame replaced happiness and innocence. And self-worth and self-respect were terms that no longer existed in my emotional dictionary.

My early experiences with abuse shaped me as an adult. All these feelings flowed through me as I grew up and entered into

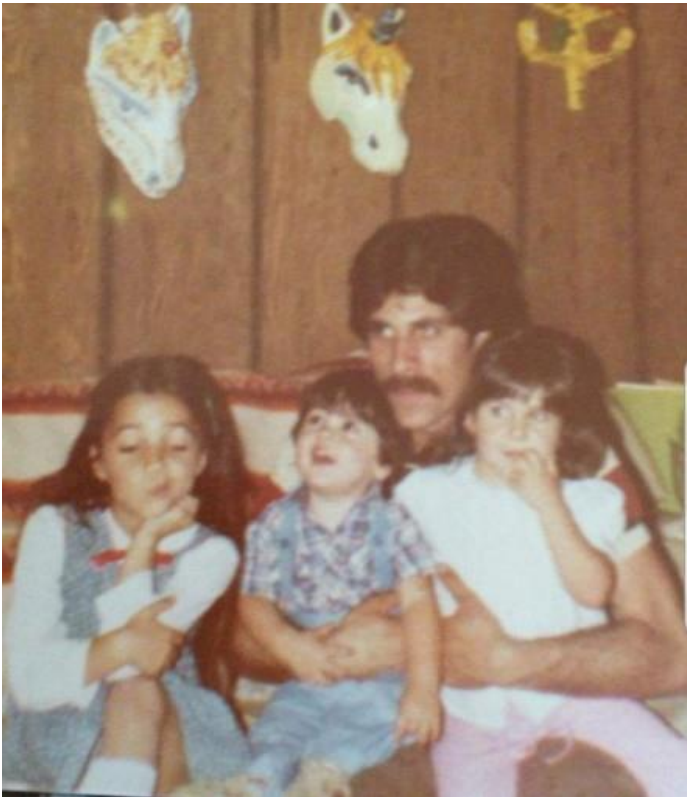
romantic relationships. In my early 20's, I met a man who would come to subject me to further violence through physical, emotional and sexual abuse. The familiar feelings of fear, worthlessness and pain became a toxic cocktail which I mistook for love. But it wasn't always bad. He treated me kindly sometimes, so that made it ok, right? He was a good provider, so that should be enough, shouldn't it?

He didn't always hit me, or threaten me or the things that I loved, only when he was mad, so it had to somehow be my fault, right?

After 15 long years of enduring abuse, started to come the sexual exploitation. Pictures had been taken during our long relationship that I entrusted him with. One day I

left the doctor's office and noticed my email inbox was full because he posted these pictures on a popular "classifieds" website without my consent and men were responding to "my" ad. Apparently, I was supposed to engage in sexual activity with them in front of him. That was it! I was done! Something inside me finally said, NO MORE!

“Self-worth and self-respect were terms that no longer existed in my emotional dictionary.”



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I spent the next few months planning my escape, but it wasn't easy. After I finally found the courage to leave, I was put in touch with an organization that helped me regain my strength. I received counseling, legal assistance and help picking up the pieces of my broken life. I learned how to build new and healthy relationships with people and how to forgive myself and others. In time, I was able to regain ME!

That strong woman that I dreamed of being when I was a little girl was now becoming a reality. I learned that it was okay to have a scarred past, that this is where my strength will come from. What I was subject to for 30 years of my past did not have to dictate my

future. I am now happy and have healthy relationships. I have a great outlook on my future, and I feel like anything is possible again.

*“I found
strength and
learned to
forgive myself.”*



My Plan

Community House Damaris is a healing community program that provides long-term recovery programs designed to guide sexually exploited/trafficked women and youth, between the ages of 18 and 29, into full rehabilitation and re-integration into society

The faith-based organization helps survivors with therapy, treatment, skill development, and art learning.

Survivors live in a home-like environment and progress through three stages where they're able to re-learn skills and take on responsibilities with the ultimate goal of increasing their independence.

Live-in volunteers help guide and provide conflict resolution and emotional support. They re-teach basic living skills, instilling trust in humans again and that there is hope for your future. Participants learn skills to help make a living for themselves and their children.

Because I understand what it's like to endure sexual exploitation and abuse, I hope to use my experiences as I volunteer with Community House Damaris during my journey in Greece.

I have reached out to the parent organization, Servants Anonymous (SA Foundation) and they have recommended Community House Damaris (CHD), so I can volunteer and connect with other volunteers and survivors. As Greece is one of their hardest hit countries for trafficking, they believe this is the best location for me to fully experience their organization and how it helps rebuild the lives of victims.



Community House Damaris is a part of the SA Foundation (Athens, Greece) and has adopted their Program Model

My Timeline

DAY 0/1

*Meet program director and leaders about
SA Foundation and Community House
Damaris*

DAY 2/3

Stage 1: Frountline House Program

- *House Director: Live-In Volunteer*
- *Exit / Rescued From Abuse*
- *Roommate Situation*
- *Develop Basic Living Skills*
- *Have A Curfew*

While I'm in Greece, I plan to document my journey by journaling and documenting interviews through video.

I will be speaking with a member at a step of each stage, asking them about where they were and where they want to be

DAY 4/5

Stage 2: Transitional Housing Program

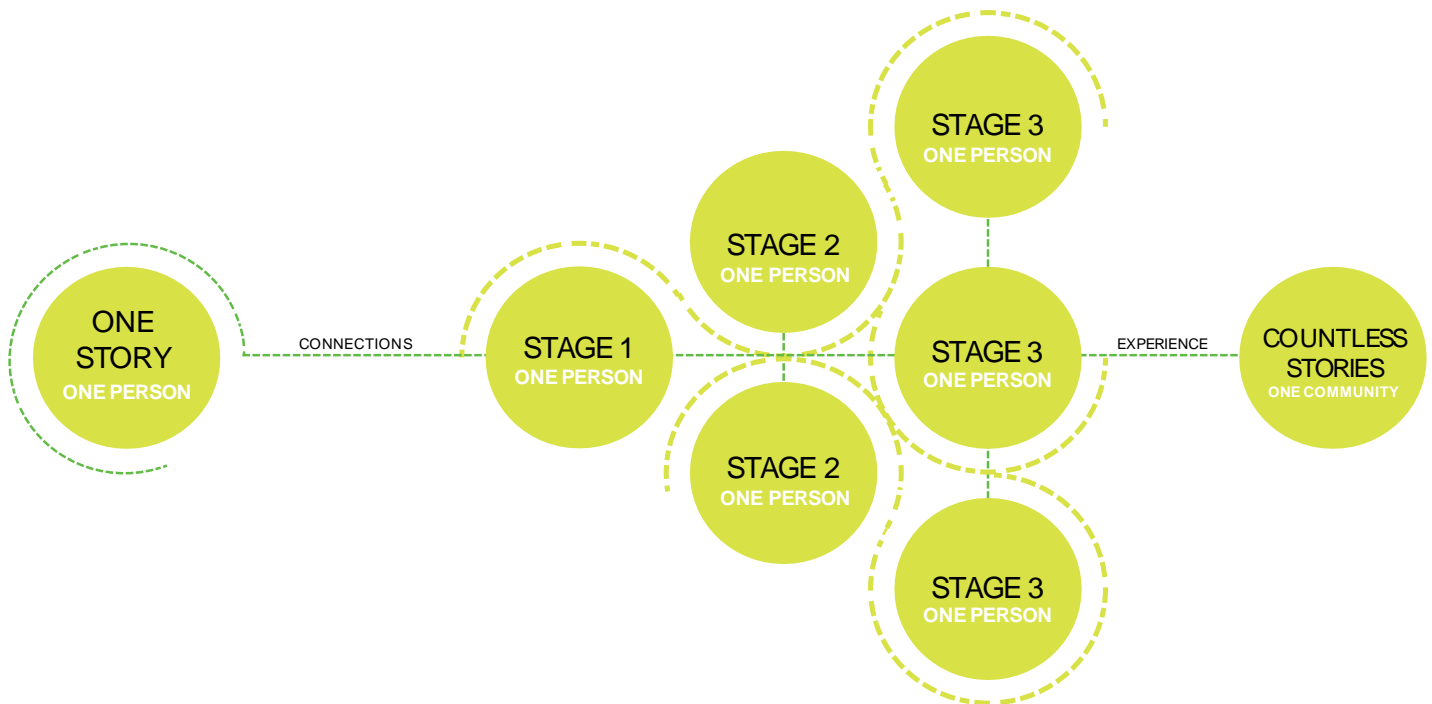
- *On-site Housing Support Volunteer to Ensure Overall Safety, Security & Problem Solving*
- *Increase responsibility & freedom within a monitored environment*
- *Organize & Facilitate House Meetings to Divide Chores and Keep Track of Household Budget*
- *Curfew Raised*

I will also speak with volunteers. They have a full-time volunteer jobs to run these houses and be support to these women and children. They live as family and share their own lives with them to give the sense of a strong foundation and that there is always someone they can count on and trust.

DAY 6/7

Stage 3: Independent Living Program

- *Live in an Apartment in the Community at Large 1 year consecutive sobriety*
- *Demonstrate solid conflict management skills*
- *Relinquished all connections to unhealthy relationships*
- *Ability to budget and save at least 10% of their income*
- *Open and willing to receive direction and new ideas*
- *Begun to build a new group of friends in the community that is healthy*



Closing Thoughts

With the help of this organization, women can (re)gain their lives and their strength. It is time to help empower those like I have been empowered. Don't let this be the final chapter of their lives.

It is our right as human beings to not let our scars define us, they are there to remind us where we have been and how far we have come on our journey of regaining our identity and sense of self-worth! With the help of others, they too can become healed and with that healing, recovery can become a trickle effect of hope and trust.

When she is healed, she then can help heal another. The healing will flow like water to cleanse the soul.

When I return and share their stories, my hope is that this will be useful for people in the firm so we can all learn about violence against women, abuse, and the possibility of asking for help.

Strength comes from the struggles you have faced within your own life. To truly understand someone's strength, you must first understand the journey that made them that way.



Help me write the next chapter of my story by following my journey to help others understand...

P.S. There's Hope



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The Hope Movement | Tumblr