

# Mary

WHEN FATHER FOUND OUT THAT MOTHER WAS WORKING AS A PROSTITUTE, HE JUST LEFT. ONE DAY HE WAS THERE, AND THE NEXT DAY HE WAS GONE. NOW HE HAS A NEW FAMILY AND HE DOESN'T THINK OF US ANYMORE. FOR A WHILE, IT WAS JUST MY BROTHERS AND MY MOTHER AND ME. BUT MOTHER WAS GONE A LOT. GRANDMOTHER FORCED HER INTO PROSTITUTION...I GUESS MAYBE SHE NEEDED THE MONEY. I'M ONLY 14, SO I DON'T REALLY KNOW A LOT ABOUT ALL THAT. WE MANAGED, THOUGH, THE FOUR OF US TOGETHER. UNTIL ONE DAY, MOTHER WAS GONE FOR GOOD. THEY TOLD ME THAT SOMETHING CALLED HIV TOOK HER AWAY. THEN IT WAS JUST ME AND MY BROTHERS, AND I WAS SCARED FOR US. AND I MISSED MOTHER DESPERATELY. FATHER TOO. WHY DID THEY LEAVE US ALONE?

WE WERE SENT TO LIVE WITH GRANDMOTHER, AND THAT WAS EVEN WORSE THAN BEING ALONE. I DON'T KNOW, BUT I THINK MAYBE GRANDMOTHER WAS MAD ABOUT MOTHER DYING, AND THAT'S WHY SHE MADE ME BECOME A PROSTITUTE TOO. FOR WEEKS, SHE SENT ME ALL OVER TO DIFFERENT BROTHELS, WHERE ALL KINDS OF MEN PAID SOMEBODY MONEY TO DO WHATEVER THEY WANTED TO ME. I LOST ALL HOPE. I LOST MY DIGNITY. I WAS HURTING PHYSICALLY AND DEAD EMOTIONALLY - A SHELL OF MYSELF.

I FINALLY FOUND A WAY TO GET A MESSAGE TO ONE OF MY RELATIVES AND TOLD THEM WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO ME. THEY HELPED ME REPORT MY GRANDMOTHER TO THE POLICE AND FILE A CASE AGAINST HER. THEN THE CHILD WELFARE COMMITTEE GOT ME OUT OF THERE AND TOOK ME TO NEW HORIZONS HOUSE. I WASN'T SURE HOW A PLACE LIKE NEW HORIZONS HOUSE COULD BE REAL, BUT WHEN I ARRIVED AND 15 OTHER GIRLS WERE WAITING OUTSIDE TO GREET ME WITH BIG SMILES AND A PRETTY PINK CAKE, I THOUGHT MAYBE IT WOULDN'T BE SO BAD. THEY ASKED ME WHAT I DREAMED OF DOING AND I TOLD THEM I WANTED TO BE A FASHION DESIGNER. NOW I GET TO LEARN TAILORING AT NEW HORIZONS HOUSE, AND SOMEDAY I HOPE I CAN BECOME A REAL TAILOR AND GET SETTLED ON MY OWN.

