

Faith's Story

CURATED AND WRITTEN BY JESSICA WAHLSTROM

If you or someone you know is a victim or survivor and needs help, please reach out to us, we are here 24-hours a day.

When we move on from something, we take bits of it with us. Often it is not until we are telling a story about our past that we realize the weight of what we carry from places and times. We feel the heft of the words that we set down as we recall, and those that we hold caught in our throats and chests. Some details are forgotten or blurred, others remain accessible, clear.

Faith clearly recalled a number of details while she told me her story about moving to the United States years ago to find work to better support her family. She remembers — for example — leaving her mother and her daughter. She described the leaving briefly, in very practical terms. In the pauses between her sentences I wondered what else she was remembering, holding. Perhaps for an instant she felt again how — once she'd decided to leave — she had already started to miss the way that her daughter's voice sounded from the same room, the way that her mother's house smelled just before they sat down to eat.



After arriving in the United States, Faith remembers climbing into a van that she was assured would transport her to a job in another state. She remembers the gnawing sense, the instinct that she had even before the van pulled onto the highway, that something was wrong. At one point from the backseat, she recalled a lecture about human trafficking that she'd sat through in school when she was younger. From that backseat a couple of days later, she remembers speeding through and beyond the town she was told was her destination, the driver ignoring her pleas to be let out. She was thirsty and hungry; she had only packed enough for the trip she thought she'd take. Faith clearly remembers realizing that she was being trafficked.

Faith recalls the moment that she decided to try to escape from her traffickers. She remembers jumping from the vehicle and running toward a convenience store to find she'd been locked out by the person working inside. She recalls begging to be let in, looking through the windows from the dark at the rows and rows of plenty — snacks and sodas, toiletries — under the fluorescent lights. Faith remembers that police officers eventually arrived at the store and took her to a safe location. She

recalls that the wife of one of the officers showed up at the police station later that night with clothes and personal items. The woman had been told what happened to Faith and she cried as she handed the items to her. Faith decided not to tell her mother and daughter about what happened. She did not want them to cry.

After she was relocated to safety, Faith remembers meeting with Andrea, an attorney who provides legal services to victims at Center for Safety & Change. She trusted Andrea fully and told her what happened. Andrea committed to supporting Faith as she moved through and beyond what she experienced as a victim of human trafficking. In the years since their meeting, Andrea has helped Faith to secure a visa to continue living and working in the United States. She has ensured that Faith understands her legal rights. Andrea worked with Faith to obtain a visa for her daughter to join her in New York. Through her work, Faith is able to support her family. "Andrea is like family," Faith asserts, "she has done so much for me." Faith and her daughter talk sometimes about what they will do next, how they will continue building a life that they want.



When you move on from something, you take bits — of places, times, and people — with you. When Faith decides that she and her daughter are ready to leave where they are now, they will take what they must, they will bring what

they want. Faith will take the power that she holds, understanding the durability of her instincts and abilities. She will bring an ever-expanding sense of security and agency. Faith will take the right to work and support her family. She will bring her strength and skills, her humor and gratitude. When she moves on, she will still feel the warmth and support — enduring — that she received from Andrea and others. Wherever she lands, Faith will be able to recall the way that her mother's house smelled just before her family sat down to eat. The muscles in her fingers will always remember what they must do to create those smells, to prepare those meals. At their own sturdy table, Faith and her daughter will sit and eat together. They will remember and they will look forward, open, to what is next. ▲