

# "Dear John"



THE  
**AVERY**  
CENTER



*DefendDignity*

Special Thanks: Polaris and Defend Dignity for  
Providing Financial Compensation for Participants.  
Thank you, TAC's International working group.



---

**Dear You,**

I know you thought you could bring us down, and I know you think you had the last laugh.

But I have given up on thinking that Karma will do me justice.

I know it is living with yourself that haunts you.

I know that the abuse and neglect you experienced is not an excuse for what you put us through.

I know that sometimes I forgive you and other days I do not.

When I forgive you, it is for me.

May you forgive yourself too.

*Mestli River*



## **A letter to my selves,**

First, I want to say, you never deserved this. It was never your fault. You were told over and over that you caused this, that you were a whore, an evil temptress, that you were the reason why grown men were buying your body and using you. But you were five the first time it happened, and no five your old or even an adult is the cause of another's sexual violence.

Secondly, you all matter. Every part has a story worth telling, beauty worth unveiling and secrets that you don't have to carry anymore. You are not alone, if you reach out inside you will find your comrades, and we will all be there to welcome you back out of the shadows. Your voice is allowed to have resonance here instead of being silenced by years of brainwashing and fear.

Thirdly, it's over. No more do we have to listen to the controlling voices of others. We get to make our own future for us. We get to decide what we want to eat, how we dress, where we live, work and who we love. We are free from the supposed freedom controlling cults promise, which in turn ends up as bonds that bind you to abuse, manipulation, and erase your identity. No more. We get to stand in the face of these perpetrator protective systems and call them out for what they are, evil and cruel.

Fourthly, the sadistic people who saw our purpose as property to use and discard are not allowed to have continued influence and relationship with us. I want each one of you to know that the love they promised was a false front for their narcissism and perverted lusts. The sadistic nature of their acts terrorized us and bent our wills to not question their influence and allowed them to have god-like status in our life. But today I want you to hear they are false gods, with puny, selfish easily damaged egos bolstering themselves up by their violence thinking they could prove their sovereignty by terrorizing us.

Fifthly, we deserve kindness, we deserve second chances, we deserve goodness and healing and happiness. Reality HAS felt so unkind, because in many ways it has been, and the grief is tremendous. To all my selves, you are worth the pain, the struggle, and the work it takes to continue to heal and stay free from anyone involved in the system that made us feel like we were incapable and weak-minded well into adulthood. You are all vibrant, intelligent, living beings housed in a single body, shining, brilliant, fierce and the evidence of impossibilities.

Lastly, thank you for helping us all to survive what has felt unsayable, and the courage for continuing to risk life even in the face of insurmountable odds. The sadists threats have been proven false by your bravery, and relentless will to survive. To all my selves, we will continue to sail through this stormy life, but we will not give up on the promise of a better future, no matter how much our sails get tattered by the harsh winds, we will keep going.

*- Dylan*

# dear john

I was under the age of eighteen  
All done up  
Just for you to be seen  
You paid for my body  
Because that's all I was  
But I'm here to tell you  
That I was just a kid  
Who didn't know what to do  
Scared and afraid  
Just because you wanted to get laid  
Each time you saw me  
Was it easy to see  
That I was someone's daughter  
That used to be innocent and full of laughter  
I try to forget your faces  
But I can't seem to do it  
And now all self-worth is lost  
But let me ask you this  
How much will it cost  
For you to wake up  
and realize we were just kids under the makeup

*Anonymous*





---

## Dear "John"

You don't know me, but I am a daughter, a mother, a sister, a friend. But to you I was just a body. Why didn't you notice the bruises? Couldn't you see the sadness in my eyes? You had no idea what was waiting for me after you left. Did you really think I liked you? Did you really think I wanted to be with you? I couldn't take enough showers after you left. I couldn't scrub off the disgust. Sometimes I would scrub my body so hard I would start to bleed. I couldn't wait for it to be over. Sometimes I wonder what your life was like? Do you have kids, do you have a wife, what kind of job do you have? But mostly I wondered what happened to you to make you think this was ok. Why do you think it is enjoyable? You were hurting me! Every time I was with you, the more I slipped away. Slowly the little girl my mom raised was dead. I became a shell, a zombie just going through the motions. Every time you were on me, I would imagine myself at the beach with my kids. I would pretend I was somewhere else with my kids. I hated the way you smell. I hated to feel your sweat on my body. Sometimes I would pray that it would all end and I would be back with my kids. But with every purchase I was told soon I could leave and go with my kids. It was always one more time. All I ever heard was you still don't have enough money to get your kids. Tomorrow you can get your kids, but that tomorrow never came. Did you know that is what I had dangling over me, my kids? Did you know I wasn't allowed to eat until I gave all my money to him. Did you know I would pass out because I was so hungry. Have you ever wished for anything?

This is what I wish for you: I wish you knew how I got here. I wish you knew I lost my innocence at 4 years old. I wish you knew I just left an abusive relationship. I wish you knew how scared I was. I wish you knew that just because I was there, it didn't mean I wanted to be. I wish you knew what it was like to be homeless as a young woman. I wish you knew what it was like to eat from a trash can because I was starving and I am hypoglycemic. I wish you knew that around 3 a.m. it gets so cold outside it felt like my feet were going to freeze. I wish you knew I wanted help. I wish you knew I just wanted my kids back. I wish you knew what it felt like to be drugged and brutally raped because I tried to leave. I wish you knew that my body will never be the same again because of all the abuse and all the rapes. I wish you knew how disgusting I think you are. I wish that you knew this isn't a choice. I wish you knew that I am so much more than this. I wish you knew that regardless of all the damage you caused me you didn't break me!!! I am still standing!! I am free!!

*From, me the one you bought*

*Corina*

**Dear John,**

It is hard for me to begin a letter to you with the name "John" when that is likely not even your real name. It means I can lump you into one category and let you get away with what you did to me and I don't even know your real name- not that you knew mine either or bothered to ask. In your eyes, I was just a commodity, not a real person, and you couldn't value me enough to know me by my name, only what I could do for you. In fact, I was "nameless", and you didn't even call me by any name. Such an insult to be used and degraded and not even given the time of day to be known by a real name.

I was young- is that why you liked me? Did you try to justify in your head that I must be older than I looked and then turned off that part in your brain where you might question yourself and if this was an okay thing to be doing or not (with a child)? To you, it was consensual, to me, it was rape. Just because I didn't fight you off or scream and cry for help or rescue didn't mean I enjoyed one minute of my time with you. If I had tried to do anything, it wouldn't have mattered because I knew who was watching me and waiting to see if I was a "good girl." You saw my smile and thought it was for you- it wasn't. It was for me- to survive.

You know where I am now? On the outside, I'm successful and strong, a resilient woman who has "made it" in life despite you and others like you. But on the inside, there are days I can barely get out of bed, when it takes everything in me to get my kids dressed and out the door for school because my mental energy is already gone because I still live with me and I can't take a break from me and I have to keep going, despite you. You don't remember me, and honestly, I don't remember "you" but I remember "all of you" and the ways that you treated me, expected me to like it because "I was getting paid" (fyi, I never got any of that money). The reality is that I didn't like it, I wanted to be home with my family and I could do what I did with you because in my brain I would separate from my body and I could be "happy" flying on the ceiling, up away from you and what was happening to my body. I didn't show distress because I wasn't even inside of me anymore- I was on the outside looking in.

And I have continued to be on the outside looking in. I am three decades separated now from what happened to me, but I will never forget. My body will never forget. I look over my shoulder constantly, avoid holidays like the 4th of July and New Years because I hate the sound of fireworks and how my body still startles easily. I wait for the "other shoe to drop" and am always surprised when good things work out for me. You are a part of this. You did this to me.

You know what I did to me? I cut myself, burned myself, starved by body and threw up anytime I ate. I went into \$100,000 of debt to recover from what happened. I counted every calorie and beat myself up anytime I went over that limit or even considered it. I hated myself.

But you know what else I did to me? I rebuilt my life. I became everything any "John" or my trafficker said I never would be. I went back to school and got my GED. I got my bachelor's degree, got married, had a family. I became a therapist working with others like me who had been exploited by others like you. And likely... I am higher educated than you are now with my master's degree and well on my way towards my Doctorate. **What men like you inadvertently tried to bring down, people like me bring fire to.** You tell me I can't do it, and watch out, it will happen.

So what did you take from ? Everything. But what did I give back to me? Everything.

*Amy*



dear johns

I just want to say, thank you. Thank you for allowing me to see what I don't want in a partner in life. For allowing me to see who and what I really want to be in my life. You may have taken advantage of me at my lowest, never again will that happen. I am better than any amount of material in this world. I know my worth. I just hope one day you can face the truth within yourself with whatever you're dealing with to take advantage of a vulnerable woman. I will be a better person because of this experience, and I will no longer let it define me. You may always see me as a Hoe, but I see myself as Sandra, a daughter, a sister, a mother, and a wife, and so do those who love me. I will never allow myself to stoop down to your level again.

*Always,*

*Sandra*

@bttrflykixx69





---

## Dear Younger Me.

It's 2am and you're lost somewhere in Georgia. When you try to call your dad to let him know you're alive, you realize Mike cancelled your cell phone service. You're angry, though not surprised. It's a time before smart phones and WIFI and you don't dare stop at a pay phone here, especially in the dead of night. You've never experienced such a dark place. The shadows feel alive and threatening, the absence of light foreboding. I know Mike raped, beat, and sold you. I know he isolated you, deprived you of sleep, promised you a wedding and fantasized with you about moving away to start a family. He coerced you with threats of suicide, fake sob stories, and phony tears. The trauma you experienced at Mike's hands left your heart, mind, and body reeling from the fallout.

But know this. You did not give up--you got out. You followed the God-given fire inside of you out of darkness and into His light. You'll get to where you're going, just like the stranger at the gas station hoped you would. Your journey will be painful as you acknowledge your wounds, but that's where healing takes place. That's where you receive beauty for ashes and joy for sadness. That's part of the great exchange. And this? What I'm experiencing? This is life abundant.

*Love,*

*Future You*



**Dear (ME) deneissha,**

I'm writing you to let you know that it's going to get hard it's going to feel like no one loves you or want you around! That's not your fault though not at all...they have problems within themselves that they need to fix...you're going to run into to ppl who will use and abuse you! Make you feel worthless and like you're not shit! But let me tell you something they're doing it because they see a light in you that they don't even see in themselves and girl they are trying to break it break you...and it's pissing them off because no matter what they do you always still seem to shine and push thru!!! You're a fucking beast but as time moves on, you'll see it for yourself, and you will not need me, or ANYONE tell you...you'll move differently, and you won't feel the need of having those nasty ass people around you.... I love you; I love you that's all that matters.

# dear john

You don't know.

You don't know that I grew up in a loving family with a mom, a dad, and an older brother. I am a first generation Canadian; my parents are both European immigrants. My brother and I did all the normal kid things; we were both siblings and best friends, going on grand adventures and bickering throughout them. I did gymnastics, which I loved. I loved the feeling of flying through the air. I was fearless.

I'm scared now. But you don't know that.

You don't know that I was just a child when I began to understand that my body was at once both shameful and powerful. I was told by my teachers to cover up at school, so I didn't entice the male teachers or confuse the boys. I guess I forgot to cover up at my friend's house because I was only 13 years old when I first understood what it meant to entice someone. My friend's uncle was not much older than you are. He's the one who taught me how to do the things I'm going to do with you. It turns out I was a quick study.

I'm still learning now. But you don't know that.

You don't know that I'm learning that I'm trapped but I have no one I can turn to. After feeding on nothing but shame for years, I decided I was going to reclaim the power that I was led to believe my body had. If my body was an enticement regardless of it being my choice, then I decided to make it my choice. I chose to use the only tool I had been born with, instead of allowing it to continue to be used against me. I was making an empowered choice.

It's no longer a choice. But you don't know that.

You don't know that behind my smile, my laughter and my teasing wink is fear, confusion, and desperation. I am the wifey of the guy that everyone listens to. I figured that I would have it all with him. Status. Money. Freedom. I was trying to play a game that was rigged against me and I'm losing. Every day I'm losing a piece of myself.

I'm falling apart. But you don't know that.

You don't know that it's men like you who are carelessly taking these pieces of me. I can't be the little girl who loved gymnastics or the little sister who adored her big brother when I'm here with you. She doesn't belong here. Here, I'm a woman who took the only tool I believed I had and tried to use it to win the game. Except I'm losing; the game and myself.

But you don't know that. I wish you did.

~ME (Alexandra)

THE SURVIVOR  
Laughin





---

Alicia, Sweet, innocent Alicia....

PLEASE close your eyes and just breath. I know you feel lost, and everything is against you and in your head, you feel like no one is ever going to believe you. I'm here to tell you that it doesn't last forever and the path you want to take isn't worth it. Know that the path your debating won't stop the pain and hurt your trying to escape. No, HE should have never touched you. But NO, YOU shouldn't sell your soul since your already being touched. Killing yourself doesn't change anything. The pain doesn't stop it gets worse my love. I know you think it looks fun Kathy, Cee and Bebe make it look so fun. I promise you the RUSH will disappear.

In a few years you will have experienced so much. YOUR so smart please stay in school. YOU DON'T have to run away or act like something you're not just to fit in. PLEASE it's not worth the temporary fun and thrill. Daddy O. Doesn't love you he doesn't have a fancy house HE is a crack head. Lives obstacles are not as horrible as there going to be in the life you think you want. I know they shamed you as a child and glorified and bragged about things they shouldn't have as staff raising you. I know the system failed you and chose to abuse you and not help protect you. That is not your burden to carry that is not yours to hold. PLEASE let go of all the hate you have towards your mom she never tried to hurt you. She just wanted to help you the people she trusted to help you turned on you and HER please don't hold her accountable for the broken system that lost you like they do most young girls.

There are so many people that did you wrong but please don't hold your self-responsible you're a child and you never deserved to hurt and go thru what you did. Don't feel like you deserve anything less than greatness STOP selling yourself short due to your image. It may not seem like it NOW but so many people will GROW to love you and cherish your existence. The bullying stops, THE HATE stops, the abuse never stops the forms just change. YOU MATTER, YOUR VALUED and most important YOU'RE NOT WORTHLESS. Don't try and kill yourself anymore it doesn't work YOU STILL live and shit just gets worse.

You are smart, kind, loving innocent but most of all you're NOT for the streets. PLEASE don't let anyone fool you into thinking you deserve a life of hell. Because in 17 yrs all you will have is memories or TRAUMA, pain and HURT and you will have the hardest time trying to build yourself from scratch. All the promises were FAKE and all they really did was LIE AND ABUSE you exactly what you're running from please sweet innocent. Alicia, please stay young I LOVE YOU.

*~ Lots of Love SINCERELY Your Older self*

## Dear men AKA Johns,

That's what I call you when publicly speaking about you  
Or fucker when I think privately about you.

I know many good men named John and I feel bad lumping them into a group of men who create and keep the cesspool that is the sex industry going, but everyone knows what I mean when I say John - it's a man who buys sex so I'll use it for this letter.

What do I want to say to you?

I survived you.

My life is full of love, my kids and I, love deeply and like every family, have issues but we go to the wall for each other in a heartbeat. I have ridiculous amounts of laughter and friendships that run long and deep and I have traveled my huge country of Canada extensively as well as Internationally, experiencing more than I could have possibly imagined. Unbelievably, so many of my idiosyncrasies - like my obsessions with the news, court proceedings, reading and writing (always with a good editor) have helped my life so much.

My heart is 10 times too full and my life 100 times too blessed.

Let's quickly talk about how we met though.

I met you between the ages of 13-28. Aged 13-18 I was a sexually exploited minor and at 18, I became a prostituted woman. Some people would say I "chose" prostitution as if the years prior had nothing to do with my "choice" to enter "sex work" (a term I don't agree with and don't use).

Why at 13 was I so vulnerable? There are lots of reasons, but leaving those reasons seemed the best idea at the time. I was a child. I wish when I ran from those reasons that I ran to a well-used security blanket to find comfort in. Instead, I had an emotionally-distant social worker; a living space or "group home" that was unsafe and volatile; I had crisis, fear, confusion and a very healthy dose of anger that I dragged around instead as my blanket.

My blanket was not soft flannel. It was jagged emotions, attitude, smoking, drinking, and dropping out of school. Internally, part of me desperately wanted help and to stop but I had no idea how to so I spiraled. A few adults tried to help put the breaks on my descent but who's safe - were they safe? How do you know who's safe if you've never really experienced it?

Enough about me, though.

There is nothing in my story that excuses YOUR behavior.

If our lives intersected when I was under 18, any grown man would have pretty quickly recognized my vulnerability and marginalization, but YOU saw that vulnerability and immediately sexualized a trauma-filled, broken-spirited, lost 13-year-old child. The fact you could sexualize a child says far more about you - a monster that some may argue lacks a soul but is definitely devoid of basic humanity, than it does about me.

For those men smugly reading this thinking, they're safe from judgment because they only see adult women. In fact, you may even think of yourself as generous, giving desperate women money in exchange for sex thinking both parties are getting what they want.

*to be continued...*

# dear johns

*continued...*

You are in fact a sexual predator.

Men, who like to think they are just engaging in consenting activities behind closed doors and that they only pay willing adult women, who do you think that 13-year-old child grew into? An actress really, such a good actress that you'd think I was willing.

By the time you got me at 19, 20, or 25 you were compounding the abuse, I'd survived. You are essentially nothing but another layer of "ick" that would have to be scrubbed off in the shower and scrubbed from my mind with gin or vodka and hopefully cocaine.

Still, feeling like a hero? A good guy?

I know so many johns that think they are "good" johns merely because they are not violent, pay the asking price, are clean, and just want a good time. Sometimes I found you harder to deal with than those that left bruises. A bruise you can point to and say, "this is my hurt."

With a "nice" guy, how do I show that I want to peel my skin off when you're done and that your smell haunts me? Sex buyers who want to get to "know me" want my name saying "Give me your real name, not your street name" as if I don't have a list of fake names a mile long and a manufactured life story to placate you with. The johns who would always ask "did you like that?", proud of themselves for some reason, as if what had just happened was actually some mutually fulfilling intimate event.

In reality, beneath you, I counted down the seconds until you were done.

If you had any self-awareness at all, my contempt for you would be apparent in spite of the academy-award-winning act I had just performed. That is what your money gets you: empty and hollow adoration. But I don't hate you anymore.

I'm not full of rage or anger, that requires too much of me and is exhausting.

However, I am also not neutral. The word I use to describe men who pay for sex is mostly pathetic.

So many of you are just misogynistic, selfish men using the flex of patriarchy and violence to demand sex while using your money to appease your conscious.

We are almost at the end, but we're not finished unless we discuss the violence you unleash on us so easily.

Do you know why pimps/boyfriends/traffickers/brothel owners/club owners want the sex industry legalized so badly?

How does an industry that so many don't want to be a part of thrive?

Violence

*to be continued...*





---

**Dear men AKA Johns continued,**

It's a constant undercurrent, present with every transaction, but not just from the men who buy sex, men who can turn on a dime from being reasonable to his hand around my throat in a split second, explaining what I will now be doing if I want to make it out of this encounter.

We NEVER know which man will be violent, but we do know violence keeps us all in line. A trafficker, brothel owner, escort owner etc needs to beat just one girl to keep all in line.

Did you know that man who pays for sex? What happens to us when you're not there?

This is not just about you getting sucked off one time, it's a whole industry rooted in violence, poverty, racism, all of the -isms, all the inequalities, to make sure there is always someone there to acquiesce to what you want.

Man, who has never hit a girl, you have indirectly.

Man, who never bought a youth, you did indirectly.

Man, who thought he was never rude or crude, you were by being in that room.

Man, who wants to believe he's a good father and family man, why is this ok to do to someone else's daughter?

I cannot end this letter without saying:

I grew so tired of your narcissistic, whiney reasons as to why you were there a few gems were

Your wife has cancer, why are you not with her?

Your wife wouldn't do what you want, so why not? Was it painful, embarrassing, degrading or some other valid reason?

You are lonely? Try counselling and work on your social skills.

Have a disability? While it may seem like a valid reason, maybe we need to make the conversation around sex more inclusive.

Perhaps you feel she's "let herself go" ..... you get the point, right? It's all her fault and instead of coming together as a unit and conquering the issues every couple goes through, you are an emotionally stunted fool, completely self-focused leaving her to further drown in what's overwhelming her while you find momentary release and deepen the crevice between you.

I am ending here; I can go on but I don't owe you anything and this feels enough.

Dear John, whatever you are looking for you will not find it by buying sex.

Purchasing sex will leave you emptier, lonelier, a criminal and broker than before you performed the act.

Do better.

Penned by Trisha Baptie contains sentiments from other members of EVE



*Dear Officer John,*

I need to address your perversion of justice. Nearly a decade ago, you released my handcuffs and muttered, "you're going to die out here." You stripped away the last bit of faith I held in humanity. Wounded and alone, I stood in the darkest alley of despair, longing for my end to come quick. It arrived, more than a year later, in the form of a new beginning rather than the expected demise. Today, as I continue healing outside of "the life", an echo of your taunt carries a painful testimony of hope. You weren't the first man in uniform, nor the last, to weaponize your authority for personal gain. In the reflection of your eyes, I saw the lowest of the low, a streetwalking addict who performed high risk sexual services to feed a habit. You met the shell of me, labeled it "empty", and dismissed the woman hiding within. You had an opportunity to provide me safety but chose to leave me suffering. I didn't deserve that. I am human too.

I grew up in a small conservative town, that has a sparse suburban feel, where the majority of families owned their homes. The schools were above average and crime rates were low. Before starting kindergarten, I was taught a variety of safety skills through Safety Town, an educational program led by law enforcement. I learned to recognize men in uniform as everyday heroes. My first crisis, however, created confusion. My father drove drunk, got into a fight, and was thrown into the car bleeding. At five years old, seeing him unconscious, I thought he was dead. The officer who arrived on scene was angry. I cried for my mom, and he ignored me. My dad was taken by ambulance, and I was returned to his dangerous side of the family. I wanted to see my mother and I needed to feel safe. I wasn't forewarned or taught that my feelings wouldn't matter and that physical proof of harm to my body would be necessary to provide service. The call for help was of no comparison to the pretend call dialed from Safety town. The real-life hero refused to protect me. The experience was traumatic, and as a result, I developed deep distrust for the police. On Sunday's I attended church with my mother and a police officer sat in front of us. He always smiled, offered a greeting and shook our hands. I couldn't figure out why officers were nice on regular days but mean during times of trouble. I internalized the experience as my fault and blamed myself when future events went wrong. As the years passed, going back and forth between parents, I endured extreme forms of child abuse but never called for help. Abuse was normalized over time. Through the teen years, and into young adulthood, sexual violence in romantic relationships escalated. On numerous occasions, fearing for my life, I dialed 911. Each time, I was left feeling degraded, and full of regret. The cry for help was met with interrogation and accusations.

Where were my marks? What had I done to upset him? A vocal reaction to intense motion (trauma response) caused the police to view me as disorderly, threatening, and potentially criminal. Each experience reaffirmed my deep-rooted belief that I deserved to be abused. I began fearing law enforcement as much as I feared my abusers. I was eventually lured into "the life" under the pretense of love. Preying on vulnerabilities (economic, social, and sexual) my boyfriend suggested I do him the "favor" of sleeping with his drug dealing friend. When I said no, he told me our lives were in danger. He sold me and the "friend" became my pimp. Refusing to meet demands, I was beaten, repeatedly raped and quickly introduced to drugs as a reward for my survival. He took my identification and controlled me with threats, pressuring me with false promises of love and a better life. The night you picked me up, I saw you drive past as I was escaping through a motel window. You likely witnessed the chase, tackle and beating. I cried out to God as I was thrown into the backseat and headed to another date.

*to be continued...*







---

## Dear Officer John Continued...

When the blue lights flickered behind me, I thought my prayer was being answered, and you had come to my rescue. My heart sank when you winked at my pimp before teasing me, "how much money have you made tonight?" Hope returned when you discovered I had a warrant. I let out a huge sigh of relief, on the way to jail, thinking I had caught a break and would finally get some rest.

The car stopped, and I opened my eyes, noticing we were in a schoolyard. You opened the door and made me turn and face the car. You were sweaty, trembling, breathing heavy in my ear. I began to cry, beg and plead for you to stop. You were frustrated but did not rape me. Peter Kreeft said, "Conscience is thus explained only as the voice of God in the soul." Would you agree? I'm not certain you felt convicted, but you did me a favor in that moment. But something, other than God, stopped you from doing your job. My return to the street was rough. I continued to spiral downward as I struggled to survive. I was lost, needing direction, and hopeless. I saw no way to escape and could no longer endure. As I set out on a mission to end my life, God intervened. A scold steel clicked tight around my wrists for the third and final time, I saw the sun rising and heard birds chirping, for the first time in years. Several officers joked, "You'll never get out of jail, your homeless." One of them heard my reply, "Thank you God for that truth." Walking into the jail, the officer turned to face me, locking eyes. I felt alive. In a soft tone he said "If you really want to change your life then ask the judge for help. You are more than your circumstance." In that moment, I surrendered fully to a new way of life. The officer's kindness didn't save me, but it provided me strength, and encouraged me to save myself. I wouldn't have considered asking for help, or be here today, if he hadn't spoken those words. I understand your job is difficult, and I hope you can understand, my life is too. We have a commonality in humanness and are both deserving of honor and respect. I'd like to believe I was the first and last woman you ever attempted to abuse. And someday, I will choose to forgive you. The damage can't be undone, but the lesson can be used for a good. I pray you will take the time to see people as people, hold back your judgement, and speak compassionate truth into and over their lives. I am not alone. Many desire to leave "the life" but have forgotten they are worthy of living. Help me build the bridge between law enforcement and survivors of sexual exploitation. Will you light up the path that leads to freedom?

- CJB.

@cjberns



dear johns

**\$25,000**

A number predetermined by someone who does not know  
me,

A sick desire, searching for endless love,  
A five-year-old sold to the arms of another,  
Unaware this was intended for life.

This number burns in my mind,  
As I question my worth,  
I loved you with everything I had,  
Unaware I was just your property.

Secrets we never spoke about,  
Realities that were never told,  
I trusted you, as I did my father,  
So, what do I do with this number?

The price I paid,  
The lies I believed,  
The safety I thought you gave,  
The love I thought we had

Tell me what I should do with this number,  
How can I ever forget?  
You were a father figure,  
I was just a number.

*Jasmin Myers*





---

**Dear John,**

I want to start this by saying that I never imagined I would have the courage to do this. You broke me, destroyed me, and stole something from me that I can never get back. I was five years old when our paths crossed, and you had already bought me before ever seeing my face. I often wonder what you saw when you looked at me. Did you notice my chubby little cheeks and the way I hid from everyone's gaze? Did you notice the baby fat that just refused to go away? Or did you notice the calluses on my hands from being the family slave? What made you look at me and think you could destroy me? My light shined bright, and you took advantage of the love I had and tried to snuff me out. You showed me this sick version of "love" that I bought into and have spent most of my life believing that is all I can get. You think you have ownership of me and that I owe you. Your \$25,000 was intended to own me for life but my dad had another plan. You don't have the right to judge me or be mad at me for learning how to master a game you placed me in. I did not choose this life, I did not want this outcome, and I did not know I was worth more. Your game bonded us for what I thought would be for life. I searched so many souls for the "love" you gave me, each lacking that sick desire of a father and daughter. Today is the day I take myself back. You no longer own me; I am buying myself back from the bed you left me in. I am worth more than your money could ever buy. I am healing parts of me you thought died. I am unstoppable and if you think for one second, I will ever be back, you are mistaken. Your claws were in me for far longer than necessary. My scars are healing, and your memories no longer keep me up at night. I am learning to breathe again without needing your heartbeat next to me. Learning how to love again without expecting this sick desire. You should be ashamed of yourself instead of forcing me to carry this shame around like a black cloud surrounding every rainbow in my life. I loved you with an innocence so pure, placing you on a pedal stool, refusing to compare you to the others. I coddled your emotions, protecting you from the labels, afraid to speak the truth. Listen to me loud and clear, I see you. I really see you for who you are. You didn't love me. You bought me, you raped me, you shattered my heart in a thousand pieces, and then you had the nerve to tell me they were wrong for what they did. My heart no longer has space for you. This is your eviction notice.

*Goodbye,  
Forbidden Love - J. Myers*

Dear past me:

I just want you to know that you good on the other side. You are a good person and care about other. That is what gets you caught up now, you care too much. That trait is what saves us. I'm proud of you for not becoming like the people that hurt you.

The game didn't love you and never did. You leave broke and broken but the come up is so much more meaningful than you could ever imagine. Everything comes full circle. You didn't need him and never did. The way you make it out and make it up is ALL you. They need you so much more than you think you need them. I'm sorry for all the pain you have to numb. You definitely pay for it physically and mentally, even now. But your story is magical. You tried for a while to run from it. You tried to be square and forget. You came back around and faced the trauma and now you have your OWN business and you're gonna help so many people. You are strong and so much more capable than anyone gives you credit for. You are amazing and brave. You got us through so much shit that I could never. Because of you, we made it out.

I wish you didn't have to go through everything that's to come. I wish there was something I could say to change it, but you're not in the right mindset to understand.

You deserve softness, you deserve rest. You deserve a love that doesn't ask you to lose yourself. The love you search for in him you can give to yourself.

You get us through the craziest situations and always make it. You never fold. Even now, when things are hard you fall and fail but find a way.

Take time to breathe and think about why you can't be alone.

I appreciate you and love you for all that you are.

Resilient

Remarkable

Escape

Sophisticated

Impossible

Laughter

Intensity

Enough

Numb

Tricks

*With Love,  
Jazmyn*



*Thank you, Survivors, for your participation, vulnerability and for sharing your truth.*

Thank you, workshop collaborators.

Niyah Sheffield

Nicole Linh

Lydia Pixler

Bianca Ramos

Daniel Eastman

