

Episode 107: Jill was kept in a basement

Content warning - this episode includes descriptions of sexual violence and domestic abuse. Listener discretion is advised.

Here in the United States, slavery is illegal. The 13th Amendment to the US Constitution was passed by Congress on January 31, 1865 and it was ratified later that same year.

That amendment reads in part “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States.”

But the fact that it’s illegal doesn’t mean it’s non-existent. The more common modern-day term for it is human trafficking.

The numbers for this are staggering. Hundreds of thousands of people are forced into sexual exploitation just here in the US. And many of them are children.

Ashton Kutcher is an actor, and he’s also a father. He’s become a major activist in the fight against human trafficking, through his foundation and the software that his team has created. This is part of what he said when he appeared before Congress to talk about this.

Ashton Kutcher

As part of my anti-trafficking work, I've met victims in Russia, India, Mexico, New York, New Jersey, and all across our country. I've been on FBI raids and seen things that no person should ever see. I've seen video content of a child - who's the same age as mine - being raped by an American man who was a sex tourist in Cambodia. This child was so conditioned by her environment that she thought she was engaging in play. I've been on the other end of a phone call from my team, asking for my help, because we had received a call from the Department of Homeland Security, telling us that a 7-year-old girl was being sexually abused, and that content was being spread around the dark web. She had been being abused. They watched her for 3 years and could not find the perpetrator, so they asked us for help. We were the last line of defense - an actor and his foundation were the potential last line of defense. That's my day job.

Scott

There’s another person who’s also very active in this fight. Her name is Jill. She knows about human trafficking because she was a victim of it. She’s had some truly horrifying experiences – things that no person should ever have to go through.

But she’s still here, and she’s doing everything she can to help put an end to it. And part of that fight is telling the story of what it’s like – from the inside.

I wanted to mention one thing that you might notice while you hear Jill talking about what happened to her. She laughs. She might be describing something that was truly terrifying, but part of talking about it is laughter. She and I actually discussed this, and she is aware of it. It’s not because she looks back on what happened and actually thinks it’s funny. A little bit of nervous laughter is just her way of coping as she talks about her experiences. Just wanted to give you a heads up about that.

Now, here’s Jill.

Scott

Do you think your childhood played a part in what happened to you later in life?

Jill

I think it definitely laid the foundation for everything that happened afterward. Unfortunately, around 96% of trafficking victims are abused as children. That's where my story starts. I was victimized by a family member as a child. That led to some pretty drastic decisions like getting married at the age of 18 to someone who was 31 years old. He was quite the trip. He was not what he advertised himself to be. That marriage went sour pretty quickly. Unfortunately, he just made a lot of decisions that put me in harm's way. He would post ads on Craigslist to have men come in and sexually assault me. It was just a constant battle of being a victim.

Scott

After being victimized as a child, it just, kind of, continued...

Jill

Yeah. I mean, it was just normal to me, unfortunately, because of what happened as a kid and what I grew up in. What a man was using me for didn't seem out of the norm because that's what had been happening since I was 5. So, for it to continue into my marriage was pretty on track for child-abuse victims.

Scott

Usually, in a situation like that, it's difficult for the woman to leave. How did you get out of that?

Jill

Honestly, I was young enough that I still had some feistiness left in me. So, I was able to, kind of, just pack up my stuff while he was away at work one day, get in my car, left, and went to a domestic violence shelter. They helped me file for a restraining order. He violated it quite a few times and spent several nights in jail. After moving, I chose to move a couple of hours away from that town. He finally did, eventually, start to leave me alone. Then, he passed away a few years ago.

Scott

Well, you don't have to worry about him anymore.

Jill

Yeah. That problem solved itself.

Scott

So at this point, you are single again. Then, you got pregnant.

Jill

Yeah. I was young. I was making some young life decisions and I wound up getting pregnant. Luckily, my mom came in and rescued me from that situation. I lived with her for a little while, but things just weren't working out. My dad said, "Hey, I've got a rental that you can live at." I said, "Okay, well, that's fine." So, I finally had my own place and some freedom to, kind of, start being a mom and being single. I met a man on Plenty of Fish. God bless that app.

Scott

For people that don't know, that's an online dating app.

Jill

Yes. It's probably the worst one available. There are lots of scams. Most of them in there are not real people anymore. The man that I met there-- we went out on one date. We went out for dinner. Then, we coordinated for him to come over for lunch the next day. The naive and young me gave him my address, like, way ahead of time - don't do that. People don't need your address if they're not coming over right now. He showed up several hours earlier than we had planned to meet. I was, kind of, caught off guard by him showing up. He came into the house. I was, kind of, like, "Do you want to tour?" As we were walking through, I showed him my bedroom and he proceeded to rape me in front of my child. My child was screaming. I was screaming. It was very crazy, chaotic, and traumatic - like, all my brain could think was, "I've gotta get the sheets in cold water to get the blood out. I don't know why I just kicked into, like, 'cleaning mom mode'. I called a friend of mine. She was like, "You have to call the police." So, that's what I did - I called the police. My father actually came over and picked up my child. I was able to file a report after that, and they did end up catching him. My father was, kind of, over it at that point. He felt like I was being irresponsible and I had let this happen to myself somehow. He decided to drop us off at a homeless shelter about 45 minutes away from everyone that we knew.

Scott

I'm just blown away by this. Your dad provided you with this place, right?

Jill

Yeah. He wasn't ever really much of a dad anyway. That was probably the most fatherly-like action he had ever taken. I was super surprised by that in the first place. He would abandon ship when things get hard. That definitely put me in a predicament with a child, with no job, with no car, and with trauma.

Scott

More trauma again. Rape cannot be described with the word 'normal', but this was pretty violent...

Jill

Yeah. He had actually sharpened his fingernails before he got there. By the time I got to the emergency room, they said that I had over 400 open wounds on my legs and my vagina just from him - whatever he was doing. So, I was covered in bruises. There was blood all over my bedroom, the hallway, and the bathroom. The detectives that came to my house actually said that this was one of the bloodiest rape scenes they had ever seen. She just kept apologizing profusely because they couldn't clean it up for me.

Scott

Your dad decided that this event was the final straw and you need to go.

Jill

Yeah.

Scott

That's just-- I have no words.

Jill

I didn't either. That 45-minute car ride was the most awkward car ride of my life.

Scott

At that point, you're really more vulnerable and helpless than ever. No job, no car, no money, and a baby. What a position to be in life... And we haven't even gotten to the main bad part of the story yet!

Jill

Yeah, these are just the prerequisites. I was pretty much in the most desperate situation, I think, that I've ever been as an adult, alone in the world, like literally removed and isolated from everybody that I knew with no resources. The shelter offered minimal-- "we'll give you a ride to a job fair, but we're not going to help you get to the job."

Scott

Right. Because their resources are limited too.

Jill

Yeah, for sure. Unfortunately, for shelters, there's a high turnover rate of staff. You get a lot of people that are there for a paycheck, and they don't really care. I think their intentions are good, but unless you have a staff that's really dedicated, it's just hard. There were a lot of other women that were in the shelter long-term. The longer I was there, I got to know a lot of them. One of the girls suggested that I download this video chatting app so that I could meet people and talk to anybody from all around the world. She was like, "You can get a lot of, like, Indian guys who want to pay you to get married. There are also some really cute guys that talk." I was like, "Okay." So, I downloaded this app and talked to quite a few different people at first - some of them consistently, some of them not. That was when I met Jack. Jack messaged me. Instantly, I was like, "Oh, my gosh, he's so cute!" I was starstruck - like, "Oh, wow!" In all of his pictures, he had suits and designer clothes. Just by looking at the picture, you knew that he smelled good. He was just super attractive. I remember he had the word gentleman in his username. I remember thinking, like, "That's what I need, right? I need a gentleman because I've had this weird, crazy life." So, we talked back and forth for several months via video and text messaging. He just really, kind of, stepped in and filled this void that I had. He told me that he cared about me. He told me that he loved me. He told me how pretty I was. He offered to send me money. He was just super supportive. He was super attractive. At that point in my life, I had nobody - my family was, like, ditched. So, this stranger was even nicer than my family is. I was just completely enthralled right away.

Scott

Yeah. He was providing what you were craving.

Jill

Yeah. He knew that. He asked the right questions to get the answers that he needed so that he knew which vulnerabilities to attack. That's kind of how the grooming process started. The beginning phase of him being so caring, so attentive, and wanting to know every detail about me was just giving him bait for later when he wanted to manipulate me and use my feelings to hurt me.

Scott

Did you know where he was located when you were talking to him?

Jill

Yeah, he told me right away that he was in New York. He told me how much money there is there. Everybody is hiring there. There's no way that you go there and not get a job. The pay rate is so much higher there. I just trusted everything he said. I could have Googled those things but, because of the relationship that we had built, I just trusted him. There were certain things I just didn't look into because I didn't feel like I needed to.

Scott

Did you know what his work was?

Jill

Yeah. I actually asked that question because, after several weeks or two of video chatting, I noticed that he was always in hotel rooms. I was like, "Why are you never at your house?" He was like, "Oh, no, I work for this marketing company. I travel." He sent me ID cards and paycheck stubs and showed me how much money he made. He was like, "I could even possibly get you on to my company. It just depends..." Everything seemed super legit. He told me his name was a different name - not Jack - I didn't find that out till I got there. The name that he gave me when we were talking over the app was not his correct name but - he sent me the picture of his nametag with his fake name and picture on it - the paycheck stubs had the fake name on them.

Scott

So, obviously, it had all been created to present this story that was completely false.

Jill

Yeah, I just didn't figure it out until it was too late.

Scott

How did he get you to come to New York City?

Jill

He had told me that we were just going to work for 30 days. He was like, "I know a place that you can get on as a bartender. You'll make a whole bunch of money. I bet you can make anywhere from \$5 - \$600 a day. If you come out here and we bust it off for 30 days, we'll save up enough money and, then, we can move back to your hometown and get an apartment. If you can just find somebody to watch your kid for around 30 days, then we'll move back, get an apartment, and live our life together as this happy fantasy couple." So, I found somebody and I was, like, "Hey, look. I just need you to watch my kid for a little bit. I got this job. I'm gonna go and make all this money. It's gonna be great. I'll be able to start my life over. I'm doing this for my kid, but I need you to watch my kid so that I can do this."

Scott

That had to be a pretty good friend - somebody who would agree to take a child for a month.

Jill

Yeah, yeah. Luckily, I was blessed with someone at that time. She was already qualified as a foster parent by the state. All of her foster children had moved out. She currently had an empty home. So, I thought that she, kind of, needed it as much as I did. He sent me money for a

Greyhound. I bought a greyhound ticket. It was a 24-hour bus ride because everything takes longer on Greyhound. I was super excited and super happy. I was going to meet the 'love of my life' and he was gonna help me get a job. We were gonna get married and live all of the fantasy things. Then, I got to New York and got off the bus. He was waiting for me there at the bus station. He grabbed my bags and helped me. We went and jumped on a subway. I knew him through video chatting and texting but I've never seen him in person, so there was just, kind of, this awkward hour or so where I was, like, staring at his face and trying to put the voice and the face together. So, there wasn't a whole lot of talking. I just, kind of, followed him, looked at him, and took in the whole situation. I was, like, stopping in New York. I saw the New York Times building for the first time, which is huge - that was something you can't imagine until you see it.

Scott

Just being in New York City for the first time is overwhelming in itself - not to mention all the other stuff going on.

Jill

I didn't know, like, that many people can exist in one space. He made it pretty quickly. Then, from the subway, I think, we took a bus. Then, we took a cab after we got off the bus. We ended up at his house. He took me through the side door. I remember thinking, like, "That's weird. People here don't use their front doors?" The side door opened up to a staircase - one goes up and one goes down. He took me down into the basement. There was another locked door at the bottom of the stairs. He unlocked that door. We went in. I was, kind of, trying to not look like I'm feeling suspicious, but I was feeling super suspicious. I was trying to look around, soak it in, and see, like, "How do I get back out of here? I don't know. This is a weird place. It's unknown." There was a little bit of normal nervousness there. We got down there. He was like "I'm sure you want to take a shower, right? Why don't you go ahead and go freshen up?" because I had been on a bus for over 24 hours. So, I hopped into the shower. I got all that done. I came out in a towel. He had opened my luggage, took all of my clothes and things out, and spread them out. He was like, "I picked out your outfit." I was like, "Oh, okay. That's weird, I think. I don't know. Or that's cute. I don't know, but okay." He was like, "Are these the highest heels you brought?" I was, kind of, chuckling to myself because, at that point in my life, I cannot walk in high heels to save my life. I was just being super ambitious when I bought those at Goodwill. So, I was like, "Yeah, definitely. Those are the highest heels I brought." He was like, "Okay, you'll wear these." I thought, "Okay..."

So, I put on the outfit that he picked out. I was like, "Oh, this is a little-- but hey, it's New York, so everybody has their skin out, right? It's fine. I'll be fine." We left for dinner - so I thought. We were walking. We took a cab and a bus at some point. Where we got off was at this, like... industrial, metal, and concrete place - I don't know. It doesn't look like New York. It was just scary. The lights were flashing - they, kind of, work but they usually don't. I was, kind of, looking around him and I was like, "Um, are we going to dinner?" He was like, "Umm, yeah, yeah. No, no, we are. Hold on. I gotta talk to you for a second." I was like, "Okay..." So, he grabbed my hand and kept walking, so I walked with him and got to this, kind of, intersection of alleys. There was this giant concrete parking block - he, kind of, had me sit there and lean against it. He was like, "Oh, do you have your phone real quick?" I was like, "Yeah, why?" I pulled it out of my pocket. The second I pulled it out, he snatched it out of my hand. I was like "What..." quicker than I could react. He handed me another Android phone that you buy at Walmart - cheap and disposable. He was like, "Here you go. This has my number programmed in." I was like, "Wait, what? Hold on!" At that time, I had a phone wallet. So, when I handed him my phone, he got my phone, my driver's license, my social security card, and my debit card. I think it had a full SIM

card at that time. He had all of it. He was like, "No, I just want to make sure that your phone is safe." He gave me some spiel about something. I don't really remember a whole lot of what he said - it's kind of a blur.

Scott

Yeah. With all this happening, your head has to be spinning and thinking, like, "What does all this mean?"

Jill

I was just, kind of, staring at him. I think, at that point, I was freezing in panic because I was trying to understand and comprehend what was happening, like, "I thought we were going to dinner. Why do you need my phone? Why do I need a different phone? What's happening? I'm really hungry." So, I was trying to process all of this. So, he looked at me. I think he can tell that I've got a deer in the headlights kind of look because I remember he grabbed me on my shoulders and gave me, like, a 'Hey! Look at me!' I was like, "Yeah?" He was like, "Okay. So the cars are gonna stop. They'll flash their light at you. Sometimes, they'll just stick their arm out the window and wave you over." I was like, "Okay..." He was like, "Yeah. Then you just go up to the window and ask him how much it is for head and how much it is for sex." I was like, "What?! You want me to do what?! He was like, "No, believe me. It's no problem. The cops around here are super cool. Actually, they might stop you too because they usually like to get some, especially when it's a new girl." I was like, "Oh, what are you talking to me about?" Then, he started to, kind of, walk away and I was like, "Hey! Wait! No, no! I thought we were going to dinner!" He was like, "We are, babe. But you've got to get the money first." I was just like, "What in the world?!?!"

Scott

I can't imagine the disconnect you would have right then.

Jill

Yeah. Just like carpet ripped out from underneath me. I didn't even have time to process it. Like, by the time he walked away, I was still comprehending that I'm supposed to go up to cars that stop and flash their lights at me. I was like, "Did he really say that?" because I was young and naive. I mean, I had a child. Even though I had a child, I just had not experienced a lot in the sexual world. So, I was really like, "You want me to do what?" It wasn't long before a car pulled up and flashed its lights. I was looking at the back of him as he was walking away. He saw the car light flashing, looked at me, and waved me on. I was shaking like a newborn baby giraffe and I couldn't walk. So, he turned around and came back down. He was like, "I forgot to tell you. You have to stay on the street. You can't stay on the sidewalk." I was like, "What?" He went, "Another pimp can take you if you stand on the sidewalk, so you have to stay in the street. I'll explain all the rules later. Let's just get the money for dinner." Then, he walked back away. I remember thinking, like, a light bulb flashed on. I was like, "Did he say 'pimp'?" That was when everything just clicked. So, this car was continually flashing the lights on me and waving at me. About that time, a police officer pulled up. I was like, "Yes, I'm getting saved! Here we go!" Right at that time, Jack walked up, leaned into the passenger's side window of the police car, and started laughing and joking. I could hear them laughing loudly. Jack stood back up. He was, like, "Get off the sidewalk." The gentleman in his vehicle was still trying to get my attention. The police officer spoke over the loudspeaker and was like, "She's just trying to catch a date, man!" He made a joke and caused me to be worried. There was a lot going on at once. I just remember thinking, "Oh my gosh... The cops..." He was right. He was serious. They're in on it. Like, they don't care. They're not coming to save me.

Scott

At that time, did you think of any possibility that you could just run away or escape somehow?

Jill

I didn't have anything. I didn't have a phone. I didn't have a debit card. I didn't have any money. I was just caught off guard. I don't even know what to do. So, for some reason, the young me just thought, "Okay, if I just do this, then I'll get the money. I'll figure out how to get away later. Let me just make it through right now. Let me not get myself into more of a situation." There was something about him. The manipulation had already started before I got there, so I was already enthralled by him - I was already, kind of, in love with him. I had that young, lustful love. So, that clouded my judgment and made me make stupid decisions. There were just a lot of layers. When he said it, it didn't sound like I had a choice. I was so used to taking commands from the men in my life - this felt like the same thing. These are the relationships that I'm used to. So, it was normal for me to be obedient, unfortunately. So, I kind of snapped back into the trauma side of things of, "Okay, wait. I know how to do this. I know how to handle this situation. You comply and you make it out later."

Scott

So that was your first night experiencing that.

Jill

Yeah. It didn't ever stop after that - it was pretty consistent - especially once he figured out how much money I could make. There were not a lot of white girls in that area of New York, especially, working the streets where I was at. So, I kind of became a hit there for a while. He was making some pretty good money. Eventually, there are undercover detectives who do come out on the track to where the girls walk, so you can't be there every night. It's just not possible. You'll go to jail. The amount of fines that you pay makes it not worth it. So, he had to find something to do with us. I say 'us' because there was me majority of the time throughout the years, there were also other girls sometimes - it just, kind of, varied. Some come, some stayed, and some didn't. He would pick up some, take everything out of their purse, and kick them out on the side of the highway. So, you just never knew what he was going to do. He had us in the basement for several months. I kind of lost track of the days - I'm not gonna lie to you. It's hard to give timeframes sometimes because when you're up all night long - sometimes, 24-26 hours at a time - you forget how many days have passed, what day it was yesterday, and what day it is today. A majority of his business with me happened at night. I did a lot of my sleeping during the day. I did convince him to let me call my mom at one point, but he was sitting right there. At that point - that was several weeks in - there had already been some violence. He would punch you or backhand you or bust your lip or make your nose bleed as soon as you said 'no' or disagreed with anything that he said. So, I didn't dare to say anything or make that phone call with him sitting right next to me because of what might happen after I hung up, because he had already made so many threats of violence. There had already been examples of physical violence. I was just pretty scared but also in love. It was a very weird place to be.

Scott

Yeah. I heard you say that part of your motivation was to make him proud.

Jill

Yeah. There was so much manipulation going on. There were so many layers to Jack's game. One of the things that he made me and whatever other girls there was he made us call him 'dad'. He used to tell me, "The reason that you're with me is because your father didn't do his job. That's why I'm your dad now." It was really hard to argue with that because it was, like, 100% true. So, he would manipulate you with things that were right. He just used them against you and made himself in control. I was a traumatized, desperate, lonely, heartbroken, and fatherless woman with a man who just stepped in and was like, "Look, I will protect you. I'm going to do everything for you. I'm going to love you. I'm going to take care of you. I'm going to feed you, clothe you, and get your nails and hair done, but you have to do this one thing for me. That's how he eventually sold it to me. "If you keep doing this, all you have to do is this one thing. This is the easiest job in the world. You don't even have to think about it. I'll do all of the thinking for you." Then, it progressed. It went from walking on the track, stopping cars, and doing sexual acts in vehicles all night long to going into hotels. He was posting me on Backpage, which has now been shut down by the federal government. That website no longer exists because they have been convicted of human trafficking. They facilitated knowingly and accepted money for it.

Scott

And Craigslist was used for that for a long time, too, right?

Jill

Craigslist was a big one. They removed their personal section, I'm sure. I haven't looked into it lately. I'm sure they found another way. It's probably under pets or something. But yeah, that's a common one. There are a lot of sites, honestly. There are a lot of options. I did not know this before I went to New York, but there are a lot of online sites where you can find girls for sale. The problem is that you don't know if the advert that you're seeing is true. All of those ads look like I posted them. They had my photos. They had my face. They had my phone number. I answered the phone when he called. Nobody knew that he was standing in the shadows, controlling my every move, taking all of my money, not allowing me to see my son, and not allowing me to call my family. I was isolated, groomed, manipulated, and sold a fantasy. He told me that we were gonna get married and have 5 sons, and I believed that I was gonna be his wife.

Scott

So, all this time when you were there, what were you thinking as far as your son? Were you able to contact the friend that your son went with?

Jill

Minimally. I did after lots of begging. I was like, "Look, I'm paying you over \$1,000 a day. Can I send my kids some money just a little bit, please?" So, I did get to get that setup. Then, some issues arose legally. They needed to provide care for him, but they didn't have any documents. So, Jack actually bought a roundtrip ticket for me to go to my hometown, sent me the money to pay for a lawyer, and get guardianship transferred over to my friends. He made it very clear that if I did not use that return ticket, there would be consequences. So, I've had that question a lot. People were like, "What?! You were out? You were gone? Why did you go back?" He had everything. He had my driver's license, social security number, my mom's address, and my kid's address. There were threats of violence against all of these people if I disrupted his plan at any point. So, I went and took care of the situation. I signed guardianship over my son. I bawled the entire time.

Scott

I know people listening to this now are just blown away that you were manipulated to such a point that you were signing away that guardianship for your child.

Jill

He used to tell me on a regular basis that my child needed a real family and that my child needed a real mother, not a whore. He was like, "I love you because you're a good whore. Your child needs a different family because you're a good whore." It was, like, his backhanded compliment. I was like "Thank you, I guess?" At least, I'm good for somebody. I don't know. I mean he's right because that's what I'm doing. He convinced me that this is all I'll ever be, this is what I was good at, and this is what I was made for.

Scott

So, he was playing with your love for your child - "This is better for the child."

Jill

Yeah. So, I listened because he had been right about everything else.

Scott

You never knew when he was going to erupt or just lash out.

Jill

No, never. Then, it progressed. When we got to the point of traveling from state to state and going to different hotels - I think it was 14 different states - that was when he eventually trafficked me. Sometimes, he would go with us, drive us there or be outside waiting or watching or whatever the heck he was doing. There were other times that he would send you on a Greyhound. He would stay in New York and he would send me to North Carolina to go to some hotels. He would post all the ads on Backpage and Craigslist, and I had a daily minimum. I had to send that money to him through prepaid cards and all that kind of thing. Even if you were 12 hours away from him, he would drive in the middle of the night and show up at 4 AM banging on your hotel room door. If you were sleeping when he showed up, heaven forbid, automatically, you would get a beating automatically. He hated finding you sleeping. The biggest offense to him was sleeping. He used to tell me all the time, "If you train your body, you can function on 2 hours of sleep. You can do it. I believe in you."

Scott

Yeah. I bet he didn't, though.

Jill

No. He got drunk and partied and slept till noon.

Scott

You talked about something that is called 'holding court in the street'. What is that?

Jill

It's, kind of, the rules of the track. If you are on the street, that's where the girls are supposed to stay. The pimps are on the sidewalk. Also, pimps can be in their vehicle. There was a situation where I was walking on the street and a pimp was yelling at me from his vehicle. I followed all the rules. I did not make eye contact with him. I did not engage in any conversation with him. I didn't address that he was even there. I continued walking and doing what I was supposed to

do, but he bumped me with his vehicle. At that point, I engaged in conversation with him because 'you just hit me with your car'. So, whenever Jack walked up, this man immediately, kind of, cowers down and was like, "I'm so sorry. I didn't realize she was yours. I didn't realize. I'm so sorry. But she talked to me. She engaged in conversation with me." Jack asked, "Did you?" I said, "Only after he hit me with his vehicle. I asked him why he did that." Jack said, "Well, I don't feel that's wrong." He was like, "Nah, man. She talked to me. She engaged with me. She's mine." This man proceeded to try and pick me up physically and put me in his vehicle. At that point, Jack interfered and took me back. It's a very odd situation to be treated like a rag doll - men were literally fighting over you. So, he grabbed me back and, kind of, threw me behind him. He was like, "Nope, we're gonna hold court before anybody's taking anybody." He was like, "Alright, that's fine." So, everybody gathered up their friends. You have to be a pimp who's known by other pimps in the area or whatever - I don't know.

They were standing in a circle and I was on my knees on the ground in the middle of the street. Jack said, "I'm going to allow this whore to tell her story. At any point, if any one of you feels that she's lying, I want you to kick her in her face." That was one of the most terrifying nights other than the nights when Jack would just beat me up because he was drunk or mad or whatever. I thought, "If all 14 of these men kick me in the face, I'm going to lose my life tonight. So, I better make this really convincing." Luckily, I did. I told my version of the story. The other man told his version. He stuttered through and they believed me. Nobody kicked me. That was, kind of, one of the first big situations where Jack was like, "Look, I told you." He used to say all the time, "If you pray to the game gods or to the pimp gods, they'll bless you and they'll protect you and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. If you did the right thing, everything will pay off. Did you see how my instruction has saved you tonight, how I've saved you?" But he saved me from a problem that he created. I would have never been in this situation if it wasn't for him. But with the narcissistic mind control that was happening, you don't see it like that. When you're in it, all you see is that you got saved, somebody cared, somebody was there, they had your back and made sure nothing happened to you.

Scott

And you've got nobody else.

Jill

No.

Scott

I wanted to ask you this. I live near Tampa. We have a football team and a stadium here, of course. In some years, the Super Bowl was held here. I've always heard that the week of the Super Bowl was when the volume of human sex trafficking around here just skyrockets. Why does that happen? What's the connection?

Jill

Unfortunately, anytime you have a large event like that, that draws a lot of tourism, you get a lot of high-spending single men who have free time. They might have a business meeting in the morning and got the rest of the afternoon. Anytime you have a large tourism event, you have people who are coming to spend money. If there are men and money anywhere, Jack used to say that you can find a trick.

Scott

That's true not just for the Super Bowl, but for any big event - usually sporting events, though?

Jill

Yeah, any big event. Jack sent us to one of the World Series to work.

Scott

Has anyone ever, sort of, blamed you for choosing to go to New York?

Jill

I mean, I blamed myself first. One of the biggest things that I dealt with is the lack of trust in myself because I made a decision to go. I do have a lot of people, though, that have said, "Well, you put yourself on a bus and went to meet a stranger." Yes, I did do that. I did not go with the intention to be a prostitute and sign my kid over and just screw my life - that was not the plan. I think people just don't understand that this is a hard situation. There's mental manipulation, Stockholm Syndrome, and narcissism. It's a crazy mixture of a lot of stuff that led me to make decisions that I would not have normally made for myself.

Scott

On your podcast - which we'll be talking about here in a few minutes - you go into a lot of the real gritty details of what you had to go through when you met these so-called 'men' - you call them tricks. That's the common term?

Jill

Yeah. Tricks or John's.

Scott

Okay. We're not going to go into all the detail of that here - people can listen to your podcast and hear that. That lifestyle - what you were doing every night - really caused you some health issues.

Jill

Yeah. I mean, it affected my body physically and it affected me mentally. I spent quite a bit of time in the hospital after I got out. I was admitted for weeks. We had to treat things like pelvic inflammatory disease, STIs, and things that happen when you go without medical care or proper attention for a long period of time, have multiple sexual partners, and just everything that went into the trafficking as a whole.

Scott

I think you said that it was a really bad case of kidney stones that, kind of, led to you being able to escape.

Jill

Yeah. Because of my unhealthy diet and eating out all the time - I lived off of Starbucks from the gas station - I actually developed kidney stones a few times while I was being trafficked. I was just in severe pain during my first few times, but they ended up passing, so it wasn't a problem. The last kidney stone that I got had me vomiting, sweating, and suffering from pain for several days. I was having trouble moving and could hardly walk. Jack did not care. I had a daily minimum that I had to meet no matter what my physical condition was, so I continued to work. I begged him. I said, "Can I please go to the hospital? Something is wrong." Eventually, he did drop me off at a hospital. I went in and they did several procedures. If the kidney stone was too larger, it wouldn't pass.

Scott

So, you had to have surgery?

Jill

Yeah. They actually had to go in and get it all out. When I was finally discharged, I sat and waited. Jack didn't show up. I think I waited outside of the hospital for, like, 3-4 hours. It was insane. It was a long time for someone who was in pain. Jack did finally show up. While I was sitting there, I remember thinking, "Why don't I just leave?" But I think I was so stubborn at that point. I had given him so much. At that point, I had probably given Jack at least \$500,000. I had nothing - I had \$0 in my pocket. I was like, "There's no way. If I'm going to leave here, if I'm going to finally get away from it, I'm going to leave with something. Like, I'm not leaving here with nothing."

Scott

By that, you meant money?

Jill

I mean, anything. I was literally empty-handed. I've got a suitcase full of, like, designer clothes and stuff in Jack's car. So, I'm like, "I'm gonna leave here with something. I cannot leave here with nothing to show for all these years, for all the work that I've put in, for all the lies I believed, for everything,

Scott

Right. Because it had been around 3 years at that point.

Jill

Yeah. It had been over 3 years since I met Jack and started talking to him and about 3 years since I had been to New York. I was infuriated. I had figured out that he didn't really care. Everything that he said didn't add up. You can't tell me that you love me and, then, punch me in the face in the same 3-hour span. Like, that doesn't work. I've tried. I thought you were going to change. I thought you were gonna be who you said.

So, he finally got there to pick me up and I got in the car. I was crying because I was in so much pain. I've been through all these procedures and stuff. My crotch was on fire. My kidneys were in pain and swollen. He had the nerve to say, "I don't give a fuck. You and that doctor can get out and make my money." I just remember sitting there thinking, "There's no way that he's serious right now." I was bawling my eyes out because I was so angered by everything that he said. He backhanded me for crying, hits me with his pinky ring, and cut my eyeball open. He hit me so hard on the left side of my face. The right side of my nose starts bleeding. Then, he was like, "Wipe the blood off." He reached into the back, grabbed a duffel bag out, threw it out onto the sidewalk, reached into his pocket, grabbed some cash, and shoved it into my hand. He was like, "Grab yourself something to eat before you go make my money." I just remember thinking, "I'm done, man. I can't do this anymore. I just can't. This is the last time that I'm going to cry to you and think that you care." I was in so much pain right now, so there was no way that I was gonna make him any money, not with my body - it just wasn't gonna happen that night. I knew what was gonna come in the morning if I didn't have the money.

I had \$7 in cash - that was what he handed to me. I walked into the train station where I was supposed to change my clothes and get some food. It was \$7 for a ticket on the train to

Manhattan. I thought, "Okay, let's just see what happens. Either way, I'll get beaten. So, do I take a chance to get out or not?" So, I hopped on the train and went to Manhattan. I was walking around crying with my duffel bag. My nose was still bleeding. My eyes were all torn up because he hit me. Then, this man stopped me. He was like, "Why are you crying?" I was like, "What?" He was like, "Look, I can tell you're not homeless. You're clean. So, why are you crying? What's going on?" Then, I verbally, like, 'diarrhea' the whole last 3+ years in, like, 5 seconds. He was like, "Come with me." I was like, "What else can happen at this point? So, let's go." So, I went with this gentleman. He took me to his, like, high-rise apartment in Manhattan. He lets me take a shower. He cooked me dinner. He gave me \$50 in cash. He said, "My wife is going to be home from work soon. I'm not going to be able to explain why you are in our house, so I need you to go, but I hope that I've been able to help you." I just remember thinking, like, "There's no way that this person is human."

Scott

A man with good intentions who wants to help...

Jill

Yeah. I was vulnerable at that point when I got there. He could have taken advantage of me, but I just didn't care so much at that point. I was like, "Whatever happens, happens." So, I took that \$50 and went to the bus station. I got a bus to Philly because it was only \$20 - that would get me out of town and leave me with some leftover money.

Scott

And Jack wouldn't have known where you were going either.

Jill

Yeah. It was just far enough away that it would have taken him-- Manhattan is so big. I didn't think he would have been able to find me there. I mean, you can't just drive around and find somebody - it's not a small town. So, I just thought that, if I can get a couple of hours away, he was really not gonna be able to drive around, find me, and let me just get out of town. As soon as I got on the bus - I did have one of the phones that I was using while I was there - I googled 'trafficking hotline' because there's gotta be something. Then, the National Human Trafficking Hotline popped up. So, I called them and they were able to coordinate a plane ticket to get me out. They set me up with a contact that they had with someone who provides services for trafficking victims.

Scott

As we're talking about the National Human Trafficking Hotline, I want to give their number out right now. That's 888-373-7888 for phone calls. Or you can text 'HELP' or some other words to the number 233-733. Just text that number and someone will want to help you.

Jill

Yeah. I think you can send about anything to that text message number - somebody will reply and get back to you. They're very discreet. They're very good at making sure that you're in a place where you can talk before they ask you for any details. They have trained professionals who are available 24/7. So they are definitely a great resource.

Scott

I'll mention that number again at the end of the show. We'll have it in the show notes as well. So you were able to contact them and...

Jill

And they got me out. They got me further away. The National Human Trafficking hotline was really great at making sure that they got me to somebody who was working with an accredited program for trafficking victims. So, they referred me to this woman. I got in contact with her personally after that. The National Human Trafficking Hotline didn't really have any involvement once they, kind of, handed me over to her. She coordinated to meet up with me. I got to this other state and was there. She picked me up. We went to her house.

Scott

This is an experienced woman who knew what to do because she did this.

Jill

Yeah. This woman was actually the founder of a very well-known trafficking survivor program. They have multiple safehouses available for survivors that are not on maps and don't have addresses. So, it's a great program. Unfortunately, when the National Human Trafficking Hotline referred me to her, they did not know that she had just recently relapsed, was on drugs, and was not actively involved in her own ministry. So, I was re-trafficked. I went to a woman who then use me for a discount on her crack. I was there for several weeks in her house before I was like, "I'm not doing this again! I'm done! I'm not staying as long as I did last time. I learned my lesson." So, I ran in the middle of the night to a 24-hour gas station that had a subway attached. I sat there until I got a hold of the actual program that I was supposed to have been referred to. They came and picked me up from the gas station and took me to the safe house. I was actually saved, then.

Scott

I was just thinking about the sequence of events. You have to be thinking, "Well, what could be next? How bad can it get?"

Jill

It's insane. I don't know if, maybe, like, trauma just makes you a trauma magnet. Unfortunately, it was normal for me at that point. It was like, "Yeah, this is what happens. Everything falls apart. Give it 5 minutes. Just hold on. It's coming." So, unfortunately, it has given me a lot of trust issues in life. It's something that I still deal with to this day.

Scott

That's certainly understandable. Yet, you keep moving forward. So, they got you to a safe place...

Jill

Yep. They were able to, kind of, help me get my life back together a little bit. I told them that I wanted to be near my older child. So, they were able to set up housing, get that move coordinated, and get me in contact with someone who was familiar with trafficking in my home state. I was able to, kind of, move home and be near my child. I also had a child as soon as I got out of the trafficking because I just came out of that lifestyle where all you do is talk to men and have sex every single day. When you come back into the real world, I was like, "What am I supposed to do every day? What do people do when they wake up?" First of all, I slept at night, which was weird. I was awake when the sun is out. So, I got to relearn how to live life. I spent 3.5 years isolated from 'squares' - that's what Jack used to call anybody who lives in the regular world, works a regular job, and pays taxes. So, I spent 3 years in this alternate universe, where

sex, money, drugs, and alcohol, like, rule the world. So, after coming out of that, I had no affection. I'm back to being alone. I don't know how to receive love or have a healthy relationship. So, what do I do? I kept sleeping around and I ended up with a second beautiful child. I'm not mad, but I've also learned my lesson on that. I'm very single. I might be single forever for this. That leaves me plenty of time. I have time to do college, work a job, be a mom, and run a household. I hand out red flags like Halloween candies because I cannot trust anybody. I can't trust men. I can't imagine a man with good intentions. It is just, like, impossible for me to wrap my head around.

Scott

Except for that one in Manhattan.

Jill

Yeah, except for that one.

Scott

And of course, he's married.

Jill

Yeah. He's very good and faithful to his wife. So I was like, "What is what is going on?" At that point, I was just like, "Whatever. Take advantage of me." But that was the only one who didn't.

Scott

How long were you at the safe place? Was it like a group home? Were there other victims there as well?

Jill

It was like a group place. I think they can hold up to 12 women. They don't have male victims at that place. So they're able to hold up to 12 women there and it fluctuated - some came and stayed for a long time and some were there on court order. They help you address every single area. They keep you safe. There are no phones there. There's no internet there. There's just a lake, grass, therapists, and a lot of Jesus. You got to undo the brainwashing. I spent a lot of years mourning the relationship that I thought I had and having to accept that that wasn't real, that it was all fake, that it was all a lie, that it was all a selling point just to get me to do what he wanted me to do so that I could pay for his life.

Scott 1

When did you first see your child again?

Jill

I had been out for probably 2-3 months before I could even face him. He was old enough that he could comprehend at that point. So, having to look my kid in the face and say, "I screwed up. I thought I was doing what was best for you. I made a huge mistake. I cost us years of our life." It's not something that I could face right away. I had to get myself healed a little bit first. As soon as I could, I did every day.

Scott 1

By that time, your child was 5 or 6 years old?

Jill

Yeah. He was going to school, having friends, and living a life that I wasn't involved in.

Scott

But you're on track to regain custody?

Jill

Yep. I am putting everything in place over the next few months. I think the judge has looked over everything and decided that they're gonna give him back. So, it's been a long road, a lot of work, a lot of legal battles, and a lot of arguing for my case. The FBI had to come in and say, "Yes, she's not lying. We have proof that this actually happened." Because it's unbelievable. Like, when you put it all out in one line, it's unbelievable that this sort of stuff can happen to one person.

Scott

It really is. I mean, I can imagine people listening to the story or listening to your podcast and thinking, "Come on..."

Jill

I told my therapist the other day, "I am so glad that we meet as often as we do because if there was nobody here to, like, witness this stuff happening as it's happening, nobody would believe me."

Scott

You got connected to a church. They helped you out quite a bit.

Jill

Yeah. They really stepped in and, kind of, showed me what unconditional love looks like. In my entire life, I had never experienced someone loving me and not expecting anything in return. I've always been waiting for the catch, but that just wasn't there. They stepped in and paid my bills so that I could take maternity leave when I had my second child. They bought me a vehicle when the transmission in my other vehicle blew up. They have, kind of, the love that I can imagine Jesus has for me - He is what I was really looking for in all the men in my life. So, it has been really refreshing. Like, "Wow! There are still good people here!!"

Scott

So your life is going in the right direction again. You're in school. You're working toward a career. You gotta be pretty happy now.

Jill

Yeah. I mean, it's great. There's, kind of, a sense of normal again, but whatever normal I think that I might achieve is never going to be like it was before because of the amount of PTSD that I have now from the situation, especially when Jack is still out there walking around freely and might try to attempt to contact me at any point. It's terrifying. I spend my life looking over my shoulder. That's just a little side part to the rest of my life that's still happening. I've made a place for myself and the death care industry. I've been able to step in and help other victims. I'm going to be able to use that to help other victims in the future. There are so many women that just go unclaimed every year. Their bodies are just left sitting because their families don't know that they're there - nobody can identify them. That could have been me. So, I want to take this experience and use it for something positive. I need it to have a purpose. I want it to have a purpose. I want to heal other women who've been through this. I want to prevent other women

from getting into this. I just want to let it serve a purpose. I think that's the biggest part of healing for me. As soon as Jack is gone - however that happens - and as soon as I can, kind of, show some progress on this, I'm excited to see it change other people's lives.

Scott

You've got a lot of good stuff on your horizon, I think.

Jill

Thank you. I'm excited.

Scott

Have you been back in contact with your dad a little?

Jill

Minimally. Not really.

Scott

Does he know what you went through?

Jill

He heard it. I don't know if he fully believes it. He hasn't cared enough to ask me about it, so I don't fully know his opinion. I'm sure he heard about it from family members and friends, but there hasn't been any in-depth conversation.

Scott

Well, let's talk about your podcast. It's called "Bought By The Hour."

Jill

Yes.

Scott

What made you decide to tell this story in your own podcast?

Jill

It's just super therapeutic for me. It's nice to be able to sit down, talk about this, and not have a face to look at because, sometimes, the reactions to the story make it hard to tell. So, to be able to just say what I want to say and freely speak about it and not have to hear the response. People can say whatever they want to the radio. On top of that, people can know that this can happen - not only just happen, but it can happen to you - and know what the warning signs of grooming, manipulation, narcissism, and gaslighting look like. There are so many aspects of this. With some education, I think that we can heal some people, prevent some of this from happening and, again, give it some purpose.

Scott

Obviously, you're doing that with your own podcast. Again, it's called, "Bought By The Hour." You've got a Facebook page for the podcast - facebook.com/boughtbythehour. People can send you messages there. Or they can listen to your podcast and leave you a voicemail message there, is that right?

Jill

Yeah, they can leave me a message. Then, I can feature that message in future episodes.

Scott

Well, we'll have links to all of that in the show notes so that people can find that. One final question - what's your advice to someone listening to this who is being trafficked?

Jill

The first thing I would say is you need to call the National Human Trafficking Hotline, whether it's calling or texting. You need to get a hold of somebody, whether it's giving them your name, your date of birth, who you are, or a recent photo of yourself so that if anything happens, they can identify you, find you, and find your family. Then, from there, they'll help you take steps to get out. It doesn't have to be immediate. There's always someone there to talk to, even if you just want to figure out what your options are.

Scott

If you're currently being trafficked, or you suspect it's happening to someone you know, please call the National Human Trafficking Hotline. The number again is 888-373-7888 if you want to call. If you prefer to text, you can send a text message to 233733. And those numbers will be in the show notes.

For me, this episode was really big and really important. Part of that was because we got to hear first hand from Jill what happens to someone being trafficked. I'm amazed at the courage she has to not only survive everything she's been through, but to now come out and tell the world this story, and be so vulnerable and transparent. You know, it would be really easy for her to blame everything on the fact that she was abused from childhood, and that would be legitimate. But she's the first to admit she made some bad decisions, and she paid for those mistakes.

But in addition to that, there were so many aspects to this story, I feel like I could have had Jill on for another hour asking her questions. And because of that, I would guess that there might be things you want to know that I didn't get to ask.

Well, guess what – Jill is in our podcast listener Facebook group. So you can look for the Facebook post about this episode, and just leave a comment or a question, and she'll see it and reply. She also might use your question in a future episode of her podcast (but she wouldn't use your full name of course). So if you aren't already in the Facebook group, you can join at [WhatWasThatLike.com/Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/WhatWasThatLike.com/Facebook).

Once again, Jill's podcast is called Bought by the Hour, and the website is anchor.fm/boughtbythehour. As I mentioned in our conversation, she talks about things in her podcast that we didn't cover here today, so I definitely recommend you subscribe to her show to get those details. That link will be in the show notes as well.

And I'm excited about next week, or more specifically May 25 to 29, I'll be in Orlando, Florida at Podfest Multimedia Expo. I'll be hanging out with a couple thousand other podcasters and if you're planning to be there, reach out so we can connect. The last Podfest was March of 2020, and it was the last big event that happened before everything shut down for Covid. So it will be really nice to see everyone in person again.

And now we're at this week's Listener Story. It's in keeping with the theme of this week's podcast – human trafficking.

Stay safe, and I'll see you in two weeks.

(Listener Story)

This incident happened at the west coast of Canada where I was being held captive by human traffickers who also traded weapons and drugs. The traffickers had taken my shoes, my ID, and my jacket and, most of the time, kept me confined to a single room. In trying to gain my compliance, the traffickers used food deprivation, sleep deprivation, sexual assault, and other violence. There was always someone directly guarding me and, usually, 4 or more traffickers in the residence at any given time. When there are people around to witness psychological sexual or physical violence, those people did nothing to stop or object to the infliction of harm. That makes that mistreatment even more intimidating and brainwashing. I had 3 things that helped me navigate through that situation. I knew how to disassociate from pain in my body. I was determined to do whatever it took to survive. I had escaped human trafficking before.

On the night of this particular incident, no amount of disassociation or determination could save me. One moment, I was being tossed around the room and beaten. The next, I was being strangled on the floor. Fighting back was inefficient. My limbs became sluggish and, then, lost function. I watched my arms fall to the floor and thought, "Oh, my arms aren't working. I couldn't move my legs." I knew what that meant, but couldn't do anything about it. My head rolled to the side. I saw a piece of lint on the carpet - just a wee fluff of carpet lint - and thought, "I'm going to die looking at this carpet and no one will know what happened to me. Mom's gonna be so disappointed." I felt more sad than I was scared. My vision went red and, then, Black. The last thing I remember feeling was that sadness and his hands around my neck. I woke up on that same carpet with the culprit watching me to find out if I was dead.

Waking up, I was very disoriented. I didn't know where I was or have any recollection of what happened. I remember looking around the room and trying to remember who had brought me into this strange place and if I was on drugs because my body felt so strange - it wasn't moving properly. My thoughts were mushy. When I could finally move, everything hurt. Then, I remembered. That was when I realized that resistance wasn't going to build my escape, that I had to feign subservience until the traffickers got sloppy. So, that's what I did. Luckily, the plan worked. After I escaped, I started studying martial arts and learned how to defend myself and how to avoid being in that kind of situation again. But I warn you this - it can happen to anyone. Human traffickers are scum.