

Tansi/Hello.

My name is April Eve Pearl Wiberg. I am a member of the Mikisew Cree First Nation (*Treaty 8*). I am a survivor of sexual exploitation and founder of the Stolen Sisters and Brothers Movement, a grassroots movement for Missing, Murdered, and Exploited Indigenous People: <https://www.facebook.com/StolenSistersAndBrothersMovement/>

I am sharing my story of sexual exploitation and traumatic experience working in sex trade establishments with you today with hopes your decision as leadership will save countless vulnerable women and girls from a very destructive and harmful form of survival. Licensing does not save lives, it does not improve wellbeing, nor provide safety or a safer environment to sell sexual services. Licensing does not shield providers from degradation, physical, mental, and spiritual harm and trauma. Licensing only protects the tax paying owners and buyers and it certainly provides a toxic environment that perpetuates organized crime. As an advocate for Missing, Murdered and Exploited Indigenous People, I believe this harmful industry is a leading factor in the national Missing, Murdered, and Exploited Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIEWG) crisis.

As an Indigenous survivor of sexual exploitation, I know first hand the harmful effects of the so called “sex industry”. During my exploitation I was warned never to reveal my true ethnicity as a Cree/Sioux Icelandic woman. I was warned from the get-go of my exploitation that revealing my ethnicity to a “client” that identifying as an Indigenous woman could get me killed, short-changed, beaten or robbed. Sadly, the Canadian wide epidemic of racism exists even in the underbelly of society as such as sexual exploitation and that revealing my ethnicity as an Indigenous woman could cost me my life. Therefore, I was sold and advertised as an “exotic”, and depending on my hairstyle, clothing I could be anything from Japanese to southeast Asian, Italian but most often I was sold as a Latina and my prostitution name often reflected as such (Maria, Mia, Monet etc). I was exploited in multiple cities in both Canada and the USA however my journey began in Saskatoon Saskatchewan.

15 years ago, I was self-liberated from sexual exploitation however the time has not healed the life long trauma being involved in this harmful industry. To this day I suffer from PTSD, severe anxiety and depression. I have identity and trust issues and I have a very difficult time with my sexual intimacy as I am often dealing with triggers of my trauma (*smells, sounds, people, places, things etc.*). It was a very difficult transition exiting out of prostitution. There were very few resources except for CEASE (The Center to End All Sexual Exploitation) an Edmonton based non-profit organization who at that time offered exited peer led support/sharing circles. I had just returned from living in the USA, where I had been exploited by New York City based organized crime unit. I would like to acknowledge that CEASE saved me from returning to my exploiters providing me with the support to exit prostitution for good. Today, with encouragement from my fellow survivors and advocates, I have just recently “came out” sharing my story of sexual exploitation publicly, first sharing my truth with the Edmonton Journal and then the international media outlet Aljazeera:

<https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/canada-needs-to-recognize-human-rights-crisis-revealed-by-final-mmiwg-inquiry-survivor-says>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/pipelines-man-camps-murdered-indigenous-women-canada-200412064302356.html>

I was targeted and groomed at the age of 19 by another young woman while living in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. At that time I was working two minimum wage jobs and just barely getting by. I lived in a low-income neighborhood and was harassed daily by sex buyers who would come into my neighborhood driving around looking for Indigenous women and girls to sexually exploit and harm. I was at that time never in the mindset of ever resorting to prostitution. I knew it was incredibly dangerous, especially for Indigenous women and girls who were racially targeted for sexualized violence, often beaten, going missing or found murdered. At that time I was often yelling and confronting sex buyers and pimps while they were harassing me and others in the neighborhood. I hated them and I felt the need to protect the women and girls being harmed.

I know now the situation that led me into the clutches of prostitution was the “perfect storm”. My mother, an Indian residential school survivor abandoned me at the age of 1 years old, leaving me with my biological father. I grew up on an isolated farm with my father and stepmother in rural southern Saskatchewan and as a child I lived in constant terror of my abusers. There were no safe spaces, both home and school were places of abuse and torment. As a child I was subjected daily to child abuse and racism. I had very low self esteem (*if any*) and I was accustomed to being unclean and having very little. I was always hungry as my abusers used hunger as a form of discipline. I remember my sister and I crying all the time, devising plans of escaping or someone coming to save us. But no one came, and we suffered, we became hopeless and our hearts full of anger and fear.

At the age of 16 my father kicked me out after finding out I had plans of running away to live with my mother for the first time in Edmonton, Alberta. He bought me a one-way Greyhound bus ticket to Edmonton. I left Saskatchewan with just a teddy bear and a second-hand suitcase hoping for a better life with my biological mother.

At the age of 17 I was abandoned in Edmonton for a second time by my biological mother. She moved to Vancouver with my younger siblings. I had nothing except the clothes on my back, I dropped out of grade 11 and I spent the next year and half struggling working a retail job, introduced to cocaine and beaten by an older boyfriend who himself was being sexually exploited (as a male stripper), ending up homeless, couch surfing in Edmonton. I tried to get help from social services as well as a local youth shelter but was coldly turned away. I reached out to a childhood friend who was going to school in Saskatoon and she offered me a place to stay. Within months of being in Saskatoon I was targeted and groomed into sexual exploitation. I was first “turned out” in a trick pad (which was a small older house in residential Saskatoon just on the outskirts of downtown, an unlicensed place advertising by word of mouth body rub- adult services). The owner eventually leased a “massage studio” in an industrial part of Saskatoon where he and his same sex partner operated a body rub advertising the adult services in a local newspaper.

Dear respected Committee members, if there is only one thing that you take away from my truth sharing is that sexual exploitation is a harmful industry and it affects women, girls, gender diverse, men and boys in a very destructive way. Do not protect the exploiters and buyers. This is an industry that is part of the national human rights crisis of Missing, Murdered and Exploited Indigenous Women and Girls. I believe that there are many like me, Indigenous women and girls being sold as “exotics” in various sex trade establishments. Please, be a part of the solution to combat human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and make the right decision to save precious lives and empower and support all people.

All my relations. Hiy hiy kinanaskomtin/thank you. – April Eve