I Just Didn’t Know

She didn’t know anything about sex trafficking. So she didn’t know how to protect her child. She was just a mom named Robyn, living in a normal, happy family in rural Washington State. Their faces were fixed on the future. Her youngest daughter, Brianna, was just six months away from high school graduation. Robyn always allowed her to “fly.” And she did. Brianna was excellent in academics, already taking second-year college courses in her senior year in high school. She was great in sports, too — a gymnast from the age of 6, and nationally competitive — and active in clubs. Brianna was independent and strong; she succeeded at whatever she put her mind to.

She turned 18, but Robyn knew her daughter. Like many 18-year-olds, “she still had some growing up to do,” Robyn says. For all the freedom they had given her to excel

The result was Chosen, a powerful Shared Hope video teaching tool that tells Brianna’s story, among others, and gives children, parents, educators, law enforcers, and others the information and resources to protect themselves from sex-traffickers. Many thousands — in schools, churches, and other community settings — have seen the video. And it continues to make a powerful impact.

“Every single family should learn the signs of trafficking to protect their kids or grandkids,” Robyn says today. “Every family should see Chosen.”

Brianna is eager to move into forensic nursing, helping victims of rape and sex trafficking. She is a living example of hope restored.

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If you suspect a human trafficking case, call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children Hotline at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678). It’s secure and anonymous and accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days per week.
For months, sex-traffickers had been posing as ordinary customers in the restaurant where Brianna worked.

She had one of the family's cars; she could go wherever she wanted. And she had accumulated her own savings account; she had money to burn.

But why? Why?

What Robyn couldn't know was that for months, sex-traffickers had been posing as ordinary customers in the restaurant where Brianna worked. They had wormed their way into her confidence, convinced her that it was time to do something daring. "The daring move? Taking off on her own for a Christmas vacation in Phoenix. They were even going to buy her plane tickets.

But by the grace of God, someone made a small but fateful decision: to return the family car. Maybe the traffickers, deciding that a car reported stolen would put them at too much risk of the law, Brianna contacted a buddy named Evan and told him she was going to bring the car to him; then it would be off to Phoenix! Evan, she said, should return the car to her family.

And Evan — knowing of Brianna's mysterious disappearance, and smelling trouble — called his dad, who called the police. Just a few months before his dad had taught him the signs of trafficking learned at a Rotary meeting.

From that moment, things seemed to happen quickly and slowly at the same time. Robyn got the word and rushed to Evan's place. The police had already placed a call to "someone named Linda" who knew something about this type of situation.

I was that Linda.

I arrived in the dark and the rain, and found Brianna distressed and impertinent. I tried to explain what might actually have happened. She might be involved with traffickers who often engage in sophisticated deception strategies, trapping even the smartest of pretty girls.

And then, after the storm, relief.

I explained to them that the traffickers had Brianna's ID, so they knew where she lived — which meant they might come after her. At the very least, they needed to store her car someplace else, so visitors wouldn't know she was home. Robyn arranged to park the car in the garage at the hospital where she worked.

Later that same night, a car crawled onto the family's property, headlights off, not seeing her car they turned around and left. Law enforcement officers speculated that Brianna had become too high a risk, so the traffickers were moving on to other targets. Robyn likes to think it’s because she has family and friends who will fight for her! In any case, phone records revealed that the traffickers had several other girls in the deception process.

We learned later that Brianna had already been shown like property to prospective buyers, and her airline tickets had already been purchased; she was being moved to Phoenix for New Year’s Eve parties there. There, finally, she would learn the real reason she was in Phoenix.

There is much we still don’t know about those who preyed on our child and nearly stole her future,” Robyn says today.

“Whatever we do know, though, is that we were not prepared to protect her. We had not told her about trafficking, and how the traffickers work, because we didn’t know ourselves. If this could happen to us, it could happen to any family.”

Brianna came home traumatized. "I still have moments when I see that frightened child," Robyn says. "After we got her back, she would often enter a room angry and accusing. We learned later that the trauma caused by trafficking, including the feeling of never being safe, needs a specific kind of counseling."

The evidence of trauma was clear. "She could not seem to get over the fact that she had been chosen — and stalked by those traffickers coming into the restaurant over several months," Robyn says. "For a long time, Brianna was frightened of going out in public."

Having been duped by supposedly friendly customers in a local restaurant, she is still fearful of many seemingly innocuous public situations.

We’ve had the privilege of working with Brianna, helping her along the path of restoration. “Without you, Shared Hope,” Robyn says today, “she wouldn’t have healed.” As she grew stronger, Brianna came to the realization that she could use what happened to her to make a difference for others — even save lives.

“She was determined to tell her story,” Robyn says, “so it didn’t happen to someone else. We supported her decision to..."