

# Children of the Immaculate Heart



June 2020

## Message from the President

Dear Friends in Christ,

Live Jesus and Mary! We have GREAT NEWS for you all! On June 10th we received our license for The Refuge from the CDSS! This means we will soon be able to open our Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program for minors who have been victims of sex trafficking. We are planning to open in July, but we first need to hire all of our staff for this new program.

Please keep us in your prayers, as we are doubling in size and have much internal growth happening. If you are interested in working at The Refuge or know someone who is, please visit our website at [childrenoftheimmaculateheart.org/job-openings](http://childrenoftheimmaculateheart.org/job-openings) to apply. To learn more news about The Refuge opening, please come to our 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Wine and Beer Tasting event on July 11<sup>th</sup>! See below for more information. You will be able to hear two of our new key staff mem-



*The newly licensed Refuge!*

bers speak – Kathleen Lambert, Case Manager for St. Bakhita’s Women’s Program and Tatiana Rosenberg, House Manager for The Refuge. Visit [childrenoftheimmaculateheart.org/events](http://childrenoftheimmaculateheart.org/events) to purchase your ticket!

We would appreciate any support you can give to our two programs, as our adult women were hit pretty hard by the coronavirus and CIH had to cover more expenses for them than usual (rent in particular). The last push for opening The Refuge includes hiring 10 more staff members and training them, so any support for our youth program is appreciated as well!

God reward you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Grace Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Grace Williams

A promotional flyer for a fundraising event. The flyer has a gold border and a background image of wine and beer glasses. At the top left is the Children of the Immaculate Heart logo. The text reads: "CHILDREN OF THE IMMACULATE HEART Presents 3rd Annual Wine &amp; Beer Tasting Fundraiser Support Victims of Human Trafficking Saturday July 11, 2020 6:30PM ~ 9:00PM \$50 Admission Hosted By Claire Reiss at her residence in La Jolla www.childrenoftheimmaculateheart.org".

# A Trafficking Prologue - Vara's Story\*

I'm on a new journey; I'm adapting and am determined to move forward in finding a better future. My whole life's been a cycle of chaos. I realized the only person that can change me is myself. I've always presented myself as friendly, optimistic, nonchalant, and laid back, but that's disguising the truth. I never wanted to be a burden to anyone, so I kind of preferred to sit in my own sorrows and keep the masks on. *I am a victim, but I am also an overcomer.*

My parents were immigrants who fled to America when Communism was hitting their country hard. We grew up very poor and lived in a two-bedroom apartment. Six of us shared a bedroom and would sleep next to each other side to side on one bed. We were always moving back and forth. I hated moving all the time, and didn't understand at all why we had to. I loved one place we lived because my great grandma lived nearby and she would tell me every day that she loved me and when times were hard she reassured me that everything would be okay.

I was pretty quiet growing-up. I did what I was told when asked. From ages 7-14 I wasn't allowed to have friends or to play outside. I was found most of the time taking care of my siblings by cooking and cleaning. My mom would explain that it was just our culture. My mother was pretty abusive verbally and physically and would tell us kids that our dad hated us, but really he was gone all the time to find work to support the family. I remember my dad as a tired, quiet man, but I also remember him being very sweet.

As I grew older, life wasn't improving. When I started high school, my great grandma passed away from cancer. At the time, she was living in Oregon to escape the gang violence in L.A. and my dad moved up there for a time to help her. When my dad called my mom to break the news she suddenly burst with joy. She went next to the fireplace in the livingroom and started praying at her Buddha shrine and burned incense. She spoke to my great grandma saying how much she hated her, that she was glad that she was dead, and that she'd never be able to take her husband and kids away from her ever again. At the top of the staircase were us kids, listening to

every word. That moment really marked the point where the abuse got worse. She started drinking alcohol; she hit me so bad sometimes I wouldn't go to school, because they might ask me what happened. I was bullied constantly because I had old hand-me downs, so I wasn't really anxious to go anyways.

Also, around that time, I was sexually abused by a family friend at 14, but my mom didn't believe me. Instead she would say, "You're a dirty little w----! You wanted it!" She'd then rip and cut up all my clothes. What do you say to your own mom when she says that to you? I felt so useless to the world. I would ask myself, "Why am I here? What did I say? Does it matter?" No one would help.

At 15, I ran away from home a few times. The first time I ran away, it felt like the best 3 days of my life. It was quiet and I had nothing to worry about. I could rest. When I came back, they shipped me off to Oregon, but it didn't work out, so I came back to San Diego. My mom was, sadly, still the same. I ran away from home again, but this time I was 16 and I was gone for three months. The only reason I came home was because my uncle - dad's side - asked me to and promised no one would hurt me. When I came home, I attended my little sister's wedding. She was only 15, but in our culture it's okay to marry that young. I wasn't okay with it. After the wedding, my dad asked me if I wanted to move back with my mom, her uncle, my uncle - mom's side - and his wife to work at the family doughnut shop.



\* To protect her identity, our client is choosing to go by the name Vara, meaning "blessing" in multiple languages, including Hebrew

My dad told me that I would receive \$2,000 a month, so I agreed. At that time, my mom wasn't speaking to me, but when I agreed to move back home and work for the doughnut shop, she was very happy and a lot nicer. I worked from opening to closing with no days off. Many times I'd be left waiting for my pay. Then my aunt said she took out from my check what I owed for rent and food then gave the rest of it to my mom. Meanwhile, money from the shop was being stolen. I didn't know what to do, so I kept working. At the time, it felt better than being home.



me sit in the bathroom with the shower running cold water and he would beat me over and over again. Later he would say "I'm sorry - I love you - you're all that I have," but he would hit me every day. When I would scream no, he would sexually abuse me too. He would tell me "You don't have anyone" and "no one loves you except me." And I believed him. He pressured me to sue my mom's uncle, brother, and his wife. I didn't want to. We went to small claims court and won \$6,000. I used that money to get an apartment in downtown L.A., but he took the money I had left over and would beat me. Then I started job-hunting. I found two jobs and when I started working, he would ask me for my paychecks. He would go with me to cash my checks, look at my check to see if the hours were right, and when he didn't think it was, he would beat me over, and over, and over again. I felt I had nowhere to go. Meanwhile, I decided to find another job - a restaurant next door to the AMC - still going to work with a black eye and busted lip. Sometimes I would sleep under my desk at work just to avoid going back to the apartment.

A few months in I met this guy who was about seven years older than me. It seemed we hit it off and he became my first boyfriend. My uncle on my mom's side started noticing me going out with this guy; he became jealous, so he started coming on to me. I would always tell him no, no, no! Then he started telling my parents that

I was the one stealing money from the shop. I ended up finding out it was his wife.



Eventually, he started coming to my room at night and made advances which became a nightly routine. I finally told my parents, but they didn't believe me. Eventually he started sexually abusing me too. That isn't what hurt me the most, though. My parents not believing me is what really hurt.

I still went to work anyway, but less and less. I started hanging out with the guy more and more. At first he was really sweet, listened, and was really supportive. I finally turned 18, and after dating for 4 months, I would go everywhere he went. I found out he had a baby. When I started living with him, he hit me for the first time. Eventually, we became homeless; taking "showers" out of Taco Bell bathrooms and getting hotel vouchers from the county. When we were in the hotels he would beat me and make

Maybe about a year and a half later, my sister started talking to me and all I can say is that she saved my life from that guy. I love her so much for that. My sister took me with her back to San Diego, and though my mom was the same, I found a job in less than a month at SeaWorld. The guy would call, but I disconnected and changed my number.

I haven't even gotten into the real spiral downwards. Finding a cut-off point is difficult for me because everything becomes a blur, finding myself in places where I didn't even realize I arrived. That's the beginning at least. This isn't a trafficking story. That comes later. Sometimes people think someone like me got into "the life" by freely choosing it. Step by step, it's a process of moving from rock to hard place. One frying pan to another one closer to the fire. A staircase going down, where, at each step you weigh out to yourself: "Which step is less dangerous for me to stay on?" It becomes measuring one way of life to another. So, no, this isn't a story of being trafficked, but a prologue.

# Little House in the Parish Coin Drive



Children of the Immaculate Heart has a meal train for our weekly women's group. We hold a support/development group for our clients every week, giving them the opportunity to be together, support each other, and grow in their personal development. If you are interested in cooking for our ladies, please visit this link!

<https://www.mealtrain.com/trains/q3nk7l>

If you participated in our coin drive and would like to return your blue house, please do so at your parish office or at St. Anne's Parish office at:

*2337 Irving Ave.  
San Diego CA 92113*

Interested in having CIH come do our coin drive at your parish? Contact our office for more info!

## Car Donation Program

Please consider donating your vehicle to CIH! *Car Easy* will come pick up your car, boat, or trailer whether it is running or not! Cars can be donated from anywhere in the country.

To start the process just call 855-500-7433 or type <http://careasy.org/details?4567> into your web browser. Proceeds go to support our programs!

## Contact Information

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