

כּוֹרֵךְ

Korekh

“I wanted to forget everything. I wanted to do something in my life. I suffered a lot...[My abuser] told me I would never learn English. He told me, ‘You think you are going to learn in just a couple of years?’ And I did and proved him wrong...I [crossed the U.S.-Mexico border] by myself. It took three days with no water. I tell myself now that I am not doing that for nothing.”

– Gladys, domestic worker (*ibid.*, p. 167)

“I think there is a lot of work to do. When I go to a conference [on trafficking] I learn a lot, and I see that there is so much ahead of us. I learn from other activists, especially the ones at the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. They really listen to workers. We have a lot in common. We all have a lot of work to do.”

– Esperanza (*ibid.*, p. 174)

“In the beginning, you often think you are wasting your time. But if you take it step by step, you can do it. It looks really hard and really big. But [newly escaped people] will get help from the program — they don’t have to do it alone...I was one of them before; I know how they think...They have a fear of making mistakes. It’s hard to say yes again. Some want to do things almost perfectly. But of course they may make the wrong decisions!”

– Eva (*ibid.*, p. 175)

In Korekh, we combine bitter maror with sweet charoset in a single mouthful. This makes real for us the dual realities of trafficking survivors, who celebrate their freedom and move forward with their lives while fighting an uphill battle against trauma and poverty. As you enjoy your sandwich, consider these diverse reflections of trafficking survivors.

“I wish the police could find him. I wish that I could send him to jail because he really destroyed me. He took a lot of time from me. But I don’t feel like I live with this; I don’t bring my past with me now...There is justice here [in America]. It’s fair here. I feel strong because I now know when I can say no and when I can say yes. I have choices.”

– Anonymous, forced into sexual labor (*Life Interrupted*, p. 148)

“It’s hard juggling it all, but if I don’t do something, I have to think about what happened to me. So if I am in school and busy, I don’t think about it too much.”

– Julia (*ibid.*, p. 166)

Can you imagine the Passover story if, rather than having figures like Moses and Miriam as our guides, it was told from the perspective of Pharaoh? Probably not. But what if it was told from the perspective of a well-intentioned Egyptian, who, though he stood to benefit from the privileges of his position, took pity upon the slaves?

Part of the power of the Israelites’ journey from slavery to liberation lies in the fact that the struggle for freedom was led by slaves themselves — and the telling and retelling of that journey was thus theirs to craft. How often do we hear today’s stories of injustice told from the perspective of a savior? How often do we hear them told by those who experienced those injustices, strategized and worked to counter them, and ultimately forged their own liberation?

As we listen for today’s stories of communities breaking from today’s bondages, let us seek out the struggles led by those most directly affected by an injustice. And if the telling and retelling of those stories sounds foreign to our ears, let us rejoice in knowing that their stories are theirs alone to craft, and ours to hear, to seek to understand, and to engage.

– Elena Stein,
former Faith Organizer,
Alliance for Fair Food

Who better to inform public policy than the people it impacts the most?

As awareness about human trafficking continues to grow, survivor voices need to be prioritized. Many groups, including concerned citizens, non-profits, and government agencies are stepping up to address this atrocity. Central to the success of these groups is the input of survivors.

Survivors are capable of informing policy, shaping programmatic and funding decisions, providing training and technical assistance, and leading educational efforts.

Survivor input will also improve the likelihood that proposed plans and solutions will work. We know what has worked (e.g., having other survivors to relate to) and what hasn't worked (e.g., inflexible shelter rules or social services protocols that don't take survivors' needs into account).

Survivors are increasingly engaging in anti-slavery work. The role of survivors is critical to our collective learning about human trafficking and the development of public policy to effectively address modern day slavery in a comprehensive way.

- Ima Matul,
Survivor Organizer,
Coalition to Abolish Slavery
and Trafficking (CAST);
National Survivor Network

“Surviving is like walking a tightrope above the abyss, one wrong move and you fall... I fell many times, and I fell hard. It hurt, it bruised, it felt numbing and alone, but it never felt like I needed salvation. I am my own salvation, and I am walking my own tightrope above the abyss we all share. I see others walking theirs... They see me too. We are all survivors of something, but we move on, leaving the past behind, to make the best of our future.

If we linger in a place too long, we do not grow, we may regress and even fall, for the tightrope is just that, a rope, and it may break under the weight of assigned identities and labels.

Yes, I am a survivor of forced sex work, but I am not only that. My identity is fluid, and it moves on, perpetually morphing into who I am evolving into everyday. **My name is Claudia Cojocaru, I was once hurt, lost and alone, but it is not who I am anymore.** I am an activist for justice, equal rights, respect and recognition of agency and women's choices. I am an artist, a researcher, and a tightrope walker.”

1. How do these quotes support or challenge assumptions you hold about people who survive trafficking?

2. What questions would you want to ask these people if you met one of them?



“Aquatic Rhapsody,” by Claudia Cojocaru

38” by 46”, Acrylic on canvas Find Ms. Cojocaru on Twitter @anarkriminology