

## HEALTH CARE



# This is what happened when a trafficking victim finally got the chance to run

By [Dan Gorenstein](#)

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A hallway in Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. - [Courtesy: Michelle Cerulli](#)

**Note:** This is the second of a three-part series about human trafficking and health care. You can find to the first part, about the challenges of identifying trafficking victims when they seek medical attention, [here](#). Find the third part, about how the health care system

## This Is What Happened When A Trafficking Victim Finally Got The Chance To Run

Jolene Capone was a runner.

"That's what they called me, it was in my file," she said. "Nobody wanted me because that's what I did."

Jolene ran from the lousy foster homes. She ran from good foster homes.

Growing up in Boston, this Italian-American kid spent more time in foster care and group homes than she did with her family.

Her relationship with her mother was awful. So Jolene almost expected it when her mom backed off a promise that Jolene could come home after she turned 18.

Plan B: Jolene moved in with her boyfriend, until that went south.

"He was a drug user, and he was really abusive. So I had to get out of that situation and so I went into shelter," she said.

Some nights she'd walk back to the shelter and see this middle-aged guy — Darrell.

"A couple of times he gave me a ride and I got home, so I just figured he was a decent person, because I didn't die," she said. "And then one night I didn't go home."



Bella Brown, formerly Jolene Capone. - [Courtesy: Bella Brown](#)

Jolene and Darrell went drinking. He convinced Jolene to sign herself out of the shelter. With all her most important possessions in tow, she and Darrell ended the night in someone else's apartment.

A few hours later, she woke up.

"All my stuff was gone. I had an empty purse," she recalled.

Darrell told her for "safe keeping," he would hold onto everything while she worked.

No phone. No birth certificate. No social security card.

No recourse.

Just Darrell insisting that Jolene agreed to work as an "escort."

"I said I wanted to go home, but he just kept saying I had agreed to this and this was

what was happening," she said. "He was in control of the situation, it didn't matter what I said."

Starting that morning, Jolene's life changed. Darrell was in charge. He decided when she went to the bathroom. He decided when she showered and when she slept.

"Just 100 percent control. Someone literally owning you. Running your life. Every single inch of your life," she said.

Traffickers often are master manipulators, using whatever leverage to keep victims under control. It can be flattery, gifts, even affection. In this case, 50-year old Darrell controlled 19-year old Jolene through fear – threatening her and threatening to hurt the few people close to her.

"I knew he would make good on it, because he was violent with me, and he had a rap sheet" as thick as a dictionary, she said.

"It's amazing what screwing with your mind can really do to keep you in control. I think a lot of people who aren't familiar with it, would be like, 'Well, why didn't you just walk away?' You would be amazed just how scared someone could make you."

In late summer 2011, Jolene traveled up and down the northeast with Darrell, every night a different hotel. It was a life that could be vicious. For example, when Darrell found tip money that Jolene had tried to hide from him.

"I would get beaten or raped, or starved or screamed at in front of people," she said. "I only did it a couple of times," she said. "It could be \$5, it didn't matter."

To Jolene, the only thing that did matter was getting out of this life. And one night the stars seemed to align. After a botched ear piercing, Jolene had a serious infection. Darrell dropped her off at an ER in Boston. She was alone. Here it was, Jolene's chance to escape.

"I'm 99 percent sure they asked me, do you feel safe at home and all those questions," she said.

That sent Jolene's mind spinning and her heart racing. First she was upset, angry at

the question's routine tone.

"You are not asking me because you care. You are asking because you can fill out your little sticker and stick that s\*\*t in my chart and say you did your job," she said.

She also doubted doctors and nurses knew how to keep her safe, knowing Darrell could materialize in a second.

"Are you going to keep me safe like no matter how bad it is? Like this person could be violent, this person could have a gun. Like you need to be prepared for it all," she said.

Plus, Jolene had her own plan. All that running had taught her to stay a few steps ahead and that night at least, she had nothing.

"Even if I did get away, where was I going? Where were they going to put me," she said. "Were they going to call my mom? There wasn't a lot of options for me, being someone that really had nobody."

So when Jolene was asked did she feel safe she said yes. Yes, she did feel safe.

Looking back, Jolene knows no murmured magic question could have broken the spell that night.

But she wonders if someone had seen that out-of-control ear infection for the suspicious clue that it was, maybe somehow things would have been different.

It's theoretical. Nobody did. And the 19-year-old teenager in sweatpants went back outside, where Darrell was waiting.

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That was nearly five years ago. Jolene did escape, eventually. Her pimp Darrell Graham was [charged with human trafficking in 2012](#) and went to federal prison, in part because of her testimony. Jolene changed her name to Bella Brown, and she is now on the board of advisors at the [Freedom Clinic at Massachusetts General Hospital](#), which provides medical, mental and dental care for trafficking survivors.

*We've collected more resources related to human trafficking, particularly in health care, [here](#).*

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