Nirmala's* Story

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* Name Changed

A little over a year ago, I was still 13 years old. I lived with my mother, but she had fallen ill. I had dropped out of school in Grade 7 and a local boy sought me out, saying, "I have a good contact in Mumbai; you can come with me and you will work there and get 8000 Rupees ($120). I thought, I could do that for a few months, earn some money and come back and help my mother and also return to school. My mother didn't want me to go but I said, "This is a local boy; I will be okay." Eventually I persuaded her. The boy took me to Mumbai but I do not know where I was. Such a big city! Soon I realized I was sold. (*starts crying.)* I had to work for a family, serving them and doing whatever they wanted from 6 in the morning until the middle of the night. I was locked up in the house and could not go outside. Every day, I just had to work. They did bad things to me. (*cries*) The man said, "We paid money to the boy for you, so you must do what we want." They said, "You will do anything and everything for us." I did not see anyone except for that family for a whole year. If I misbehaved according to what they asked, then they tortured me. The doors were locked; I could not escape. So I just wanted to die, to kill myself.

After a year, another servant came to the house, an older woman. She saw my situation and finally kept a door unlocked. I ran through Mumbai asking for the railway station. When I got there, I just sat down and cried. An Odiya man (*who spoke my language*) came up to me asked what was wrong. When I told him, he arranged for a ticket back to Berhampur (in my district). He also called ChildLine *(a project of ISRD)* and I spoke with them, and they met me when I got off the train.

I spent 3 months in the Children's Shelter. It's God's grace that I survived. For the first month, I did not speak. I got good counseling and good care, but I felt so bad, I still wanted to die. Eventually the (ChildLine) counselors helped me talk and I could accept their comfort. They then arranged for my family to meet me again. I knew my mother always loved me. That thought helped me stay alive, even when I felt hopeless. I am so grateful she accepted me right way. After we were reunited, I learned that the same boy who trapped me also persuaded my cousin, the daughter of my uncle, to go with him to the city. We don't know where they went, and she is still missing. The police were called to arrest the boy, but he ran away. (*Because he is a minor*), they arrested his parents but they say they don't know anything.

I stayed home for two months and then ChildLine asked me if I wanted to join the (*Prajwala*) Caravan, to tell my story to other girls so the same thing won't happen to them. I just finished that experience and many people cried when they heard my story. I hope I helped some other girls and I want to help more. I will go back to school, starting Grade 8 next month. But I have not told anyone in my village what happened to me other than my own family.

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