

No, it's not the game. It's the players.

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It could have been her. That's what University of Colorado alumnus Elizabeth Woller says she took away from the experience of running the cameras for *Tricked*, a film about domestic sex trafficking. "These girls could have been me, they could have been my friends," Woller says.

Woller recorded interviews with the film's central character, Danielle Douglas, a Boston college student whose pimp "boyfriended in" to convince her to walk the streets in Massachusetts towns, selling blowjobs for \$30 and sex for \$50. Another survivor, a high school girl from Aurora, met a man on the Internet who then kidnapped, assaulted and prostituted her. She escaped. Most don't. One of the initial supporters of *Tricked* was a CU mom whose daughter was trafficked while she lived in Boulder.

"This is an American issue. It's not a Third World issue, it's an American issue. The film focuses a lot on Colorado because it is a major issue in Colorado, but it's in every state," Woller says. "It's your neighbors. It's your neighborhood. It's your city."

The film drills that message home in one interview after another with trafficking victims, pimps, victims' advocates, victims' parents, attorneys and the police who put boots on the ground to try to put a stop to the practice. They come from cities across the country — New York City, Boston, Chicago, Duluth, Las Vegas, Houston and Denver. Woller was recruited for the Denver interviews by the film's producer and co-director, Jane Wells, who founded the nonprofit 3 Generations to continue sharing stories from survivors of human rights abuses like those recorded in her documentary, *The Devil Came On Horseback*, about the genocide in Darfur.

On any given day, according to Woller, an estimated 300 children are sold for sex in Colorado, and sold up to 10 times a day. It's a \$3 billion a year business and among the fastest growing criminal industries in the United States.

At the core of *Tricked* is an inquiry into how we look at prostitutes in America — how often are we treating victims as criminals?

Douglas, the victim-turned-advocate whose story is central to the film, says she was arrested as many as 50 times for prostitution, and not once did someone stop and ask if she needed help. So her pimp would bail her out and within hours she was back on the "track," walking the streets and selling herself. A former Las Vegas escort echoes, if she had known she could have gone to a security guard and said she was being held, and sold, against her will and gotten help, she would have.

The pimps, on the other hand seem to think they have impunity — and because prosecutions in these cases are so difficult, some days, they do.

But *Tricked* shows their faces and their conversations with police as they're being handcuffed in front of pleasantly beige suburban homes.

"Many of the pimps were just fine with being caught, they don't see anything wrong with what they

many of the pimps were just fine with being shown, they don't see anything wrong with what they do," Woller says. "So they didn't think it would be a problem for them."

Footage was collected over three years, relying on cooperation from law enforcement, particularly Sgt. Dan Steele of the Rocky Mountain Innocence Lost Task Force, which works to address child sex trafficking ("Tracking down the trafficked," *Boulder Weekly*, July 25, 2013).

They also relied on a "community vigilante" in Chicago who keeps track of the girls and connected the filmmakers with victims and pimps there.

Tricked is showing all over the country in a theatrical ondemand distribution — enough people from an area purchase advanced tickets through Gathr.us, and they get a screening.

"People's main reaction is just shock. They don't know that this is happening," Woller says. "They never really thought about prostitutes as actual victims of traffickers, so that's a real shift in how people are perceiving these women and it's been an incredible response, just so positive from everyone, so we really feel like we're getting the message out there."

That was the goal — to spark national dialogue about the issue to bring greater attention and awareness, and perhaps even some policy or practice changes. In 2013, Colorado law enforcement agencies rescued 61 juvenile sex trafficking victims — but there are only three beds for minor victims of sex trafficking in the state.

In her director's statement, Wells lists the myths that surround prostitution in America she hoped *Tricked* would help to dispel, among them: That it's a victimless crime, it's not going away, that girls do it by choice and it's a great way to pay for college.

It's precisely the kind of work that got Woller into filmmaking. While she was studying abroad in Jordan, a female journalist there took on the issue of honor killings.

"She had succeeded in changing not only the legal ramifications for these men that killed their sisters and daughters, but she also changed the culture around it so people were actually talking about it and seeing it as a bad thing," Woller says.

When she returned to Boulder, she started working with the filmmakers at Landlocked Films and has continued since 2008 to focus on filmmaking that draws attention to human rights issues. She met the *Tricked* filmmaker, Wells, through her son, who Woller met in Beirut while completing a graduate degree in Arab and Middle East Studies at the American University.

Tricked will screen at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 9, at the Colony Square Stadium 12, 1164 W. Dillon Road, in Louisville. Elizabeth Woller will attend the screening, as will Sgt. Dan Steele and Danielle Douglas, one of the survivors interviewed in the film, and an advocate from Denver. Additional information on the film can be found and tickets purchased at their website, www.trickedfilm.com.

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