

Kidnapped by a paedophile I met online



Alicia Kozakiewicz was 13 years old when she slipped out of her home in Pittsburgh to meet someone she had been chatting to online. What followed was a nightmare. Now 27, Alicia has made it her mission to protect other children from what she went through, and has had a law named after her in several US states. This is her story in her own words.

I REMEMBER the Christmas of 2001 was really wonderful and so was the first half of New Year's Day 2002.

New Year has always been a day of celebration for my family. We'd have a big meal - my mum would make pork and sauerkraut - and that year my mum was there, my dad, my brother, his girlfriend and my grandmother, and these are the last moments of my childhood that were peaceful. Where I was just Alicia.

At some point between dinner and dessert I asked my mother if I could go and lie down. I said I had a stomach ache. The next thing I knew I was in a car with this man, and immediately I feared for my life

But what happened was that I got up and slipped past the Christmas tree which was by the front door, and I opened the front door to meet this person that I thought was my friend.

This wasn't in my character at all. I was a child that was really scared of the dark and I hated the cold - I still really hate the cold - and I never went outside alone after dark without an adult.

I remember walking up the street just about a block or so and the streets were covered in ice and there was nobody out. What I remember most is the silence. How silencing snow can be. There were no dogs barking, there wasn't anything other than the snow crunching under my feet. I remember standing on the corner and this little voice finally spoke up - my intuition - and said, "Alicia what are you doing? This is really dangerous you need to go home."

I turned around and started walking back, but then I heard my name being called - and the next thing I knew I was in a car with this man, and immediately I feared for my life.

My childhood up to that point had been an amazing one. For most of my childhood my mum stayed at home, so she was there with me all the time, whenever I needed her, and so was my brother who is nine years older than me. My dad worked really long hours but he always left space for family time. So we were - and still are - a very close family. My childhood was filled with so much fun. People online may be strangers at first, but then you learn about them, and soon they seem like friends. Recently I had my old home movies transferred to digital and I've been going through them. Looking back I was just a really happy kid. I thought that people sang like they do in Disney movies. I just thought that was how people lived, so I was always singing to the trees or the rocks or to my shoes because I thought that was

how happy people expressed themselves. And I was really saddened to find out that the world was not like a musical where everybody dances and everybody sings.

It was my older brother who introduced me to the internet. He was always playing games online. I think Diabolo was one of them. I wasn't interested in that particular game, but it did look like a board game and I realised that the internet was a great way to play these games with other people. That's really all I thought it was. At that time the internet was really just entering the home and my parents had thought that they had given my brother and me this wonderful gift. They had talked to me about "stranger danger" but there is a difference between a stranger you meet on the street and the stranger you meet online. People online may be strangers at first, but then you learn about them, and soon they seem like friends.

In 2001 and 2002 there were very few people educating children that the internet could be dangerous. I got a screen name and got online. My friends and I would talk about all sorts of things. It seemed like a time before kids realised that cyber bullying was a possibility and it seemed like everyone got along online. The most popular kids would talk to the less popular kids. I felt safe.

There was one guy, a boy who I thought was around my own age, that I didn't know, and he was into all the things that I was into. He listened to what I had to say day and night, giving me advice. He was somebody to complain to and to get comforted by over the eight or nine months before my abduction. Online grooming is very effective. He was the one I walked out to see on New Year's Day and who kidnapped me in his car. He was grabbing my hand so tightly that I thought it was broken and he was barking commands at me. Things like, "Be good, be quiet!" If I didn't obey, he said, he would put me in the trunk.

He sped off down my street and past my house. I thought, "Maybe he'll just drive around the block." Then, "Maybe he'll just drive to the next neighbourhood." I paid attention to the street signs and they went from being very familiar names to names that I couldn't recall being anywhere near my home. After some time the car reached a toll booth and in my mind I remember thinking, "This is my chance, this is when I'm going to be rescued because this person in the booth is going to see a crying child and think, 'What is going on?' And call the police and this whole thing will be over."

But the man in the toll booth didn't see me or think that there was anything wrong, and the car sped on.

He then removed my clothing and looked at me and said, "This is going to be really hard for you - it's OK, cry." I remember looking out of the window and seeing the phone boxes and thinking, "What if I could get to one of them, what would I say to my family? How could I get out of this, let them know that I'm in danger?"

There are no words to explain the fear and terror of thinking this person could pull over and kill me at any moment. He continued to drive for about five hours from my Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania home to Virginia. Finally, the car stopped, he pulled me out of the car and dragged me into this house - and continued to drag me down a flight of stairs that seemed to go on forever in my mind. I'm sure it was a flight or two but it felt like it was an endless maze. Once he'd got me into the basement, there was a door with a padlock on it and he took me inside. On the walls were all these devices that my 13-year-old mind just couldn't comprehend.

He then removed my clothing and looked at me and said, "This is going to be really hard for you. It's OK, cry."

After that he put a locking dog collar around my neck and dragged me upstairs to his bedroom and raped me. He chained me to the floor with this dog collar next to the bed. I was raped and beaten and tortured in that house for four days.

I have to tell you that it's amazing the response I get sometimes when I say that. Sometimes people say, "You're so lucky, that's not that long." They really have said that. I want to make it clear that you cannot define pain by time, or what happened, it's how the experience affects the person. It's how it impacted them. Whether you're held captive for four days or abused by somebody you love for years, or molested for 15 seconds on a bus, it's your experience and your pain that defines it, not the length of time and not what actually occurred. While I did what I could to survive, no matter how humiliating or painful or disgusting, I had no control over my fate. When I did fight him I ended up with a broken nose. And he'd already kidnapped a child, he'd already done unspeakable things to me, why would murder be something that he couldn't do?

On the fourth day he said: "I'm beginning to like you too much. Tonight we're going to go for a ride." I knew in that moment there was nothing I could do. I knew he was going to kill me. That day he also fed me for the first time in four days and he left for work. A man ordered me to crawl out from beneath the bed and to put my hands up

I remember crying and praying, really praying and I thought about all the things I would do if I were stronger, if I were a character in a superhero movie. I thought, "He's going to kill me, but I'm not going to go down without a fight and maybe I could win?" But then I realised that I'd already lost many times. I soon lost all hope.

I thought about my parents a lot over those days. I knew that they were looking for me and that they loved me. I had no doubt in my mind that they would find me. They could move mountains, and they would do anything to keep me safe. I knew they wouldn't stop until they found me. The question was whether they would find me alive, or dead. I thought: "When was the last time that I told them I loved them? Did they know how much I loved them?"

I started to accept my own death. I drifted into a dazed sort of state. But then I heard the sound of angry men banging on the door downstairs. Because I'd lost all hope I thought they were there to kill me, so I rolled underneath the bed to try to hide from them and stayed as quiet as possible. I heard them moving very quickly around the house. I also heard them shout, "Clear! Clear! Clear! Clear!" Now, I would know exactly what that meant but at that time I had no idea.

I must have made some noise because I heard a man say, "Movement over there!" I saw boots come along the side of the bed. A man ordered me to crawl out from beneath the bed and to put my hands up. I remember dragging that cold, heavy chain out, and trying to put my hands up but also trying to cover myself at the same time. I had no clothing on. I was staring down the barrel of a gun.

I thought, "This is when I'm going to die. This is it." Then the man turned around and I saw FBI on the back of his jacket, and all of these law enforcement agents rushed into the room. They cut the chain from around my neck and helped me up. They set me free. They gave me a second chance at life. These men and women, they

are my angels. While I was held captive, my kidnapper broadcast himself abusing me online. One of the viewers recognised the little girl in this horrible video as the little girl from the missing posters. It is important to note, that the greater majority of children are rescued due to missing posters and alerts released on the internet, radio, TV, highway signs, digital billboards, mobile phones and so on. If you come across a missing person flyer, please pay attention.

The viewer went to a phone box, called the FBI, and gave them the screenname of the abuser. Through this, the FBI found his IP address which led to me. It was a miracle. Essentially, one monster came forward about another. I'm so lucky. Had those law enforcement officers stopped for coffee, or had their car broken down, I might not be here with you now. He was due to arrive back to his house at 4.30pm and the law enforcement arrived at 4.10pm. This is the perfect example why, when a child is missing, every single second counts.

Even today, people are shocked when they hear a story like mine. In 2002, when I was kidnapped, it seemed impossible for them to understand how this happened and that I was groomed. Simply, they blamed the victim, which sadly, is not much different from sexual assault cases of present day. However, there were those that were supportive and I hope they know how much I appreciate their care and concern. My family and I vowed that we would make a difference and help to save other children and families. We realised that a factor of this ordeal was that no internet safety education was being taught in schools. After my own period of healing, at the age of 14, I began going into schools, giving presentations, and sharing my story. Today, nearly 14 years later, I am continuing my mission, sharing my story with people around the globe, and advising families on internet safety.

Additionally, I work alongside Protect to secure the passage of, Alicia's Law, named after me, in all 50 states of the US. Due to a lack of dedicated federal resources, less than 2% of known child exploitation cases are being investigated. Alicia's Law provides a dedicated steady stream of state-specific funding to the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Forces. By creating this new revenue stream, Alicia's Law builds permanent capacity for child rescue teams - revenue that will not fall victim to yearly fights over or cuts to the general budget.

Alicia's Law has been passed in Virginia, California, Idaho, Kentucky, Texas, Tennessee, Arizona, Hawaii, and Washington. We are currently working on Alicia's Law in Wisconsin, Maryland, and South Carolina. I am now working on a masters degree in forensic psychology and am graduating in just a few months (Yay!). I plan to work with children and their families who have been affected by abduction or child sexual exploitation. For years I struggled with personal relationships. The most loving gentle touches could suddenly seem evil and full of harm. But, the day after I graduate I am getting married (bigger yay!). My fiancé supports my mission and he is a great guy but above all he is a great friend.

What is really important to remember, and took a long time for me to learn, is that rape is all about power and control, and love never is.

In 2003 Alicia Kozakiewicz's kidnapper, Scott Tyree, pleaded guilty to taking a minor across state lines for the purpose of sex and producing sexually explicit images. He was sentenced to 19 years and seven months in prison.

SPORT



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Threat to internet

by Tony Wilson

CHINESE fishing trawlers moored in Mele Bay to access a fish processing plant would pose a serious threat to the supply of the internet to the nation, says the internet provider.

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