IN OUR BACKYARD

HUMAN TRAFFICKING
IN AMERICA
AND WHAT WE CAN
DO TO STOP IT

NITA BELLES
This book is dedicated to all the precious ones being used as modern-day slaves, to those of you who are sleeping in doorways or on the floors of garages, utility rooms, warehouses, crowded houses and apartments, and other places you never wanted to be. It’s for those of you who have given up hope of finding help and those of you with a shred of hope left.

It comes with a message that you are loved—by people you’ve given up on, by a God who loves you in the midst of your circumstances—and with a message that many of us who care are on the move. We are committed to doing what we can and to petitioning God on your behalf for the rest. Yes, you are loved. Believe it.
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Most of all, I give thanks to God.

These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor. 13:13)

May this book help to demonstrate that love in helping to end the atrocity of modern slavery.
Preface

We have only begun to scratch the surface in the fight against human trafficking. If there were only one soul still being trafficked, our fight against this atrocity would continue, but the ugly truth is that there are millions. We have much more work remaining.

This book is a resource to help regular citizens understand what human trafficking is, how to recognize it, and what to do if they see it. Human trafficking exists in every state and nearly every city. If you look hard enough, you’ll even find it in our nation’s small towns and in the countryside. In short, it’s in our backyard. And we can all help stop this atrocity.

I live in a beautiful rural area. Our region consists of small, sleepy western towns, cities, and farming communities, with some of the seemingly safest streets in the country. Tourism abounds here, with 315 days of sunshine a year, wide-open spaces, rivers, lakes, mountains, and air that smells so good it should be bottled. Not surprisingly, this area attracts conventions and other gatherings, as well as wealthy (some very wealthy) individuals looking for upscale and resort living. If human trafficking can happen in my hometown, it can and does happen anywhere. No community is immune.
Preface

I began to study human trafficking while working on my master’s degree in 2005. The stories I uncovered were the most tragic I had ever known. “What can I do?” I asked. The answer that came surprised me: “Write a book about human trafficking.”

I had never written a book before—my gifts seemed to be in teaching, training, networking, motivating, and caring deeply about individuals. Doing those things came easily to me. By contrast, writing this book was very difficult. I felt I was being asked to do something not impossible but well out of my comfort zone.

My hope is that this book will help save some child, some young woman, some young man, as it encourages all of us to love as we would want to be loved in this fight against human trafficking and beyond. I’ve written stories I’ve seen and heard, stories that have broken my heart and, I suspect, will break yours as well.

It certainly broke my heart when I learned about what was happening in other places around the globe. But when I understood what was happening here in America, in this country where I live and which I dearly love, I knew this is where I was called to make a difference. I have lived my entire life here and never realized until 2006 that slavery still exists on US soil. I had to do something.

What do I have to offer the victims and survivors of modern slavery? While I’m often described as an expert on this subject, I am still learning every day. My best teachers, and the ones I respect beyond words, are those who have survived and are surviving this atrocity.

None of us can be all things to all people. I wouldn’t last long kicking down brothel doors and grabbing pimps by the back of the neck with a “Listen here, young man!” But most of us can tell people about human trafficking, sit with a victim and listen to him or her, guide victims to services to help in their recovery, work to improve legislation, call the authorities when we see something that looks suspiciously like human trafficking, and network with
anti-trafficking organizations and agencies. By doing these things, we can take a stand and might even save lives in our own community.

This book is not intended to be an all-inclusive look at modern slavery in the United States, but rather a sampling to inspire you to uncover more truths about this outrage for yourself. Although I mention the work of many organizations, I have intentionally not endorsed specific anti-trafficking organizations. Instead, once you realize how pervasive this tragedy of human trafficking is, I encourage you to get behind one or more of the many anti-trafficking groups, especially in your own backyard, and support it as a volunteer or by financial donations.

I must admit I hesitated to share some reports of victims’ experiences that are so horrific I feared you might be tempted to doubt them. But to give you the full scope of what’s really happening in our country, I have included a number of them anyway. Unfortunately, the truth is sometimes worse than what you might imagine.
Modern Slavery
It's Everywhere

All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men [or women] do nothing.
—Edmund Burke

Sarah* carefully navigated the early-morning traffic to school in “Betsy,” a silver 2003 Honda Accord with black leather seats and bright chrome wheels, which her parents had given her for her sixteenth birthday. Two weeks earlier, her parents had thrown her a sweet-sixteen birthday party with pizza and prizes at church after youth group. All her closest friends had come and watched as she was presented with “Betsy.” A big sign on the windshield read “HAPPY BIRTHDAY SARE-BEAR!” Sare-Bear was her parents’ endearing name for her and a reminder of how special she was to them.
The present, however, had come with conditions. Her upper-middle-class parents had given her just two months to get a job to pay for Betsy’s gas and insurance. And despite Sarah’s 4.0 GPA, her new car also came with a curfew and the insistence from her parents that they know where she was and who she was with at all times.

The morning had not started off well. Sarah hated arguing with her mom, but lately her parents’ rules had been getting under her skin. “With privilege comes responsibility,” they said. But now they were even telling her what she could and couldn’t wear. Just last week she had bought a shirt from Abercrombie that her mom made her return because it was “too tight and too low.” She didn’t really want to be a bad girl; she just wanted to fit in with what the other kids were wearing. Besides, she really liked that shirt!

As she pulled into the school parking lot, she saw her new friend Maggie* wearing the exact shirt she’d been forced to return. Maggie not only had nice clothes, but she had all the freedom she wanted. This was high school after all, the time to have fun. Why couldn’t her parents be more like Maggie’s?

“Hey, Sarah!” Maggie was always so happy to see her and seemed truly friendly. “How was your weekend?”

“It was good. My family went to the beach. I really like your shirt! I actually bought that shirt, but my mom made me return it.”

“Why? Was there something wrong with it?”

“No, my parents thought it was too tight. Maybe I should have bought a bigger size.” In front of Maggie, Sarah always felt like she had to make excuses for her parents’ rules.

“That’s how these are supposed to be worn. Hey, I’ll give you mine tomorrow. I’m going to the mall tonight, and I’ll get myself something new. Besides, I think this is a better color for you than for me. It will look so cute on you.”
“Maggie, you don’t have to do that. Besides, my mom would
freak out if she saw me wearing that after she made me take it back.”

“Why would you need to tell her? Just leave it in your locker
here at school.”

Before Sarah could say anything, Maggie continued. “Your par-
ents seem really strict. I’m trusted to make my own rules. I don’t
have curfews. I do what I want, when I want to do it.”

That sounded good to Sarah, especially after the way she and her
parents had been butting heads lately. They said she was rebellious,
but how could she not be? They didn’t seem to understand her or
her needs. They had no idea what it was like to be a teenager today.

The next day, Maggie came not only with the coveted shirt but
with another one as well. “Here’s the shirt I promised, along with
this other one I thought would look so sweet on you. It will show
off your curves. If you’ve got it, flaunt it!” They both laughed.

“I can’t take both of these. I don’t know how I could possibly
pay you back,” Sarah said. She had been applying for jobs at all
the clothing stores in the mall as well as at all the fast-food places,
but no one seemed to be hiring.

“Don’t worry about it.” Maggie winked at her. “There’s more
where that came from. Let’s hurry before we’re late for history.”

Sarah changed into the new shirt after first period and ate lunch
with Maggie that day.

“Doesn’t it feel good to wear what you want to wear? You look
so pretty in that shirt! You’re doing the right thing by following
your heart.”

Their friendship grew. Maggie was so at ease with herself, a
trait Sarah admired.

And she loved how Maggie made her laugh. Even though her
jokes were a little crude, Maggie was so much fun and her life
seemed so much more exciting than Sarah’s. Before long, Sarah
confided in Maggie about her unsuccessful job search.
“I need to get a job to pay for insurance and gas for my car. Plus, I want to be able to buy some clothes to keep at school so my parents can’t forbid them,” she said with a sigh.

“Hey, the work I do is really easy. I can totally set you up,” Maggie offered. “All you have to do is go on a date with this guy. You’ll have to make out a little, but it won’t be a big deal. And I can get you forty bucks for it, which should cover your gas for the week.”

“Who is the guy?”

“No one we know. He’s older and just a little lonely. You just have to pretend you really like him for a couple of hours. It’s easy money!”

Forty bucks to go out on a date? That sounded good to Sarah. Her parents would think she was at the school football game, and she could still make her curfew. The guy was in his twenties and she’d only be with him for a short time. Besides, the idea that her parents would think she was at the game while she was earning some quick cash seemed exciting.

Slippery Slope

The date didn’t quite go as advertised. The guy demanded more than just making out. Sarah was uncomfortable at first, but it wasn’t like she had sex with him. He only pushed to get to “second base,” as the girls at school would say.

As promised, Maggie was waiting for Sarah after the date. She soothed her friend’s concerns, and they had time to grab a Coke before Sarah had to go home. Maggie mixed some vodka in hers but Sarah declined. The date was one thing, but she knew better than to drink and drive. As they chatted, Maggie shared her weekend plans, which included not just one date but two, and with different men no less. How Sarah envied her newfound friend!
Sarah, however, had no idea Maggie wasn’t just a friend. She was actually what is known in sex trafficking as a “bottom b–tch.” In a pimp’s “stable” (the group of girls that he sells), there is continuous competition to be his favorite. The “bottom” is the most loyal and has a higher status both with him and within the stable. She can do many things the other girls can’t, such as arrange dates for the other girls, collect money, train and discipline other girls, and recruit; however, she still has a monetary quota to meet by having her own prostituted dates. Befriending Sarah was just part of Maggie’s job.

Sarah’s weekend crawled by. Comparing Maggie’s life to hers made hers seem even more boring. Sarah felt a little conflicted about what she had done on Friday, but at least she wasn’t a “square,” to use Maggie’s terminology, like some of the other girls she knew from church. Sarah wouldn’t find out until later that the word square is used in sex-trafficking circles to define anyone not involved in prostitution or what is more likely than not forced prostitution.

At school Monday morning, Maggie said that Sarah had really been a hit with her Friday date, and he wanted to get together with her again. They arranged for Sarah to meet him after school that Wednesday.

“You’re so exciting to me,” the man told sixteen-year-old Sarah.

His words pleased her and made her feel like a real woman. She agreed to drive up to the butte in his car to make out again. This time she was more comfortable. She really enjoyed the fact that her parents had no idea where she was and what she was doing.

Over the weeks that followed, Maggie and Sarah became better friends, and Sarah continued to go on occasional arranged dates. She could now afford insurance and gas for her car, had new clothes, and was leading a life as exciting as Maggie’s. Besides, the lie she
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had told her parents about her new job was buying her extra time away from home. The increased fighting with her parents was unfortunate but worth it because, in addition to her new job, Sarah had a new romance.

Maggie had introduced Sarah to her friend Ace.” They were now secretly boyfriend and girlfriend. Sarah thought about him constantly. She was in love for the first time in her life, and he seemed to adore her. He had introduced her to sex and loved her in ways she’d never even known existed.

“The fact that I was your first makes me love you all the more,” he said. Sarah had previously believed having sex outside of marriage was wrong, but now she was so in love with Ace, and she knew one day they would be married. She felt that somehow this justified their relationship.

During the month they’d been together, Ace had bought her new clothes, perfume, music, and DVDs. He told her that he had never met anyone like her, that she was special and their love was eternal. They talked about living a wonderful life together. No one had ever cared for her in the way Ace did, and she was convinced he was right about everything. She realized now that her parents didn’t really love her at all. Their so-called love was just about controlling her life. His love showed her what she really wanted, not just what they wanted her to be.

Admittedly, he did sometimes hurt her. Nonetheless, she wanted to be with him all the time. She would do anything for Ace. She had recently come to believe that’s what a person does when it’s true love.

She knew there were other girls in Ace’s life, but he told her that she was the only one he really cared about. “That’s the biz,” he said. He was referring to the “dating service” where Maggie “worked.” He told her he had to mingle with all the girls to keep them on the straight and narrow.
She guessed they were prostitutes, but after meeting them, that didn’t seem to matter. They were just real people. Somehow they didn’t seem as bad as she’d been led to believe. And as Ace said, business was business.

Over the next few weeks, her feelings for Ace deepened. He always did little things to prove his love for her, like the time he sent all the other girls away so they could share the night together in a nice hotel. She came close to getting caught by her parents, who thought she was at her friend Sally’s house. The narrow escape made her realize that if she and Ace were ever going to have the life they dreamed of, she would have to leave home. She was prepared to do whatever it took to preserve their love.

Fake Love and Real Love

One day Sarah drove over to Ace’s for their usual lunchtime together. “I have to move to Vegas, and I want you to come with me,” he told her. “I can’t live without you, Sarah. I’ve never loved anyone the way I love you, and we will be so happy there. No more hassles from your parents, and we can be together all the time.”

They left for Vegas about an hour later, after ditching Sarah’s car in the school parking lot. When they reached Sacramento twelve hours later, they met up with some of Ace’s friends.

“We need money, baby. All the other girls are back in Seattle. I know you’ll be with me in your heart, but I need you to do these guys for us.”

Sarah was surprised, but she knew the game. Besides, no matter what, she and Ace were together. She would think of him while she was with the others.

The next morning, Sarah was still reliving the nightmare of the night before. She had heard of gang rape, but she had never been
roughed up and humiliated as she had that night. Part of Sarah wanted to believe that she and Ace would soon have their life together in the big, beautiful house they had talked about.

As she handed Ace the cash from the night before, Ace questioned her firmly to be sure she was giving him all of the money, including tips. He tried to tone down his demands by saying, “That’s the biz; you know that.” And she did know that. Pimps always get 100 percent of the earnings. “Don’t worry, baby, we’re going to be living the dream soon,” Ace said. But despite his assurances that she wouldn’t have to do this forever, Sarah knew she had just been turned out and was now a “working girl.” She had no doubts about her new nightly duties. Men would pay her for sex, and she would bring the money back to Ace. A mere three months after she’d met Maggie, a life of pain and pretending had just begun.

Sarah’s parents never quit looking for her. They searched up and down the West Coast, as well as in Reno, Vegas, and Phoenix. Although they hadn’t found any trace of their daughter, Sarah’s mother still knew in her heart that Sarah was alive. One day the phone rang.

“Sarah’s been found,” the detective on the case announced. “She’s in Las Vegas.”

Though “the life” had been extremely hard on Sarah, she had been afraid to leave, and there was a strange and unexplainable desire in her heart to stay. Despite all that, she found herself relieved that the raid on the brothel where Ace had placed her had rescued her from the life. Many times over the year she had feared she would be killed. Yet, she wasn’t willing to talk with her parents. She was embarrassed, knowing full well what an enormous disappointment she’d proven to be. Law enforcement had to call her parents anyway.
When her parents walked into the room at the juvenile hall where the now seventeen-year-old Sarah sat in a brown overstuffed chair with her head hanging down, she didn’t look up. Sarah’s formerly fit body was skinny, and her skin was pale and sickly looking. Her pretty, naturally curly blonde hair barely covered the tattoo on the back of her neck where Ace had branded her as his property. Her mother knelt by the chair where Sarah sat with her hands covering her face in shame.

“Sare-Bear, I love you,” her mom blubbered between her tears. “You are the most beautiful sight I have ever seen.”

As they fell into each other’s arms in sobs, her dad’s long arms encompassed them both, and the three of them cried together. There would be many decisions to make, many tough days ahead, but Sarah was reunited with her parents, who had never stopped loving her.

A National Crisis

Sarah’s story has a happier ending than most. She was able to get into a Los Angeles shelter called Children of the Night, where young girls who have been rescued out of sex trafficking are provided with the services they need to recover from their traumatic experiences. She received, among other things, treatment for the venereal diseases she had contracted, counseling for her emotional scars, and a diploma when she completed her high school education.

Unlike Sarah, however, too many human trafficking victims never escape their horrific lives, partly due to the fact that many of us have no idea this is even a problem in our communities. It may come as a surprise to learn that the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children estimates that well over one hundred
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thousand children are trafficked yearly in America.¹ While many of these young victims are runaways or foster children, others are from what would be considered “good” families and have been lured or coerced into human trafficking by clever predators. “These predators are particularly adept at reading children and knowing what their vulnerabilities are,” says FBI Deputy Assistant Director Chip Burrus, founder of Innocence Lost, a project addressing child and teen sex trafficking.²

But human trafficking in this country doesn’t just take place where sex is sold. Labor trafficking, which occurs on the streets, in homes, in factories, in fields, and any number of other places, is also big business.

Authorities estimate that

• there are 27 million slaves in the world today, more slaves than during the transatlantic slave trade;³
• human trafficking is tied with arms dealing as the second largest criminal enterprise and is the fastest growing;⁴
• about 80 percent of all trafficked individuals are female; about 50 percent are children;⁵
• 70 percent of those female victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation;⁶ and
• between 244,000 and 325,000 American youth are considered at risk for sexual exploitation, and an estimated 199,000 incidents of sexual exploitation of minors occur each year in the United States.⁷

The above figures, however, are limited estimates of youth at risk for human trafficking and do not take into consideration adult US citizens trafficked for sex or American children and adults trafficked for labor.⁸ Each year, an estimated $150 billion is generated by victims of human trafficking, $99 billion of which comes from
sex trafficking and $51 billion from other forms of trafficking. A few more disturbing statistics:

- Each year, between 14,500 and 17,500 people are trafficked into the United States from other countries.

- One study estimates 30 percent of shelter youth and 70 percent of street youth are victims of commercial sexual exploitation. They may be coerced into prostitution for “survival sex” to meet daily needs for food, shelter, or drugs.

- Nationally, 450,000 children run away from home each year. One out of every three teens on the street will be lured toward sex trafficking within forty-eight hours of leaving home. Statistically, this means at least 150,000 children lured into sex trafficking each year.

- Average age of entry into sex trafficking is 12–14 for girls and 11–13 for boys.

- One study out of Portland, Oregon, found that 96.4 percent of the victims in the study were female, close to 2.8 percent were males, and 0.9 percent were transgender. (Please note: these numbers are from the Portland study and may not be representative of all populations.)

- The same study found that 49.1 percent of the youth who were served by social services had a gang connection.

Admittedly, these numbers are guesstimates based on the best data available today. The hidden nature of the crime makes exact numbers difficult to come by. We all want to see human trafficking statistics because they help us get our minds around the problem. However, with these types of crimes, even those statistics obtained by expert researchers conducting studies with the greatest degree of accuracy possible under the circumstances become best guesses. You can well imagine victims of human trafficking are not able or willing...
to raise their hands to be counted. Still, these studies help us understand that human trafficking is a problem of epidemic proportions.

How is it possible that all of this takes place right here in the United States, and yet we don’t hear much about it? Somehow we have operated under the misconception that this crime only happens overseas in places like Bangkok, Thailand, where many of us have heard about children being trafficked for sex; in the villages of India, where slaves do backbreaking work crushing rock for sixteen to eighteen hours a day; and in Russian cities, where young women are recruited and shipped to other countries. Unfortunately, though, it happens right here in our country.

**Why Focus on the United States?**

Many people don’t think about the sale of human beings happening right here in America. If we consider the possibility of human trafficking within our borders, our assumption may be that it’s confined to Las Vegas, New York, Los Angeles, and other large cities. Even those who recognize that human trafficking is as much an American disgrace as an international one sometimes don’t realize this crime doesn’t just occur in our big cities. Although human trafficking has certainly been discovered in large urban areas, it can flourish in upper-class suburbs, rural areas, and even in small towns like the one in which I live.

Human trafficking happens in upper-middle-class neighborhoods where people who travel or do business internationally “invest” in domestic help, who upon arrival in America can become modern slaves.

In search of a cost-effective workforce, resort communities, hotels, and country clubs sometimes unknowingly hire agencies that are actually fronts for slave labor.
Modern Slavery

In places where regular conferences are held—including but not limited to political and business conferences—as well as at large sporting events, sex-trafficked individuals are made available because traffickers know there are consumers with money who will buy them.

Finally, as you’ll read in chapter 3, even church elders have unwittingly supported human traffickers.

That’s why whenever I am presented with a reasonable (and sometimes, I must confess, not completely reasonable) opportunity to enlighten folks about the modern slavery that’s happening all around us, I take it, because I know the extent to which this problem permeates our land. Its prominence here makes sense if you think about it. Human trafficking follows money. America, being the richest nation in the world, stands to reward human traffickers with some of the highest profits anywhere.

In February 2014, my husband and I visited the 9/11 Tribute Center, where guides share their personal stories of surviving the September 11, 2001, terror attacks. We walked around and heard story after story of the horrific killings or, as 9/11 survivors prefer to call it, mass murder that occurred on that day. Our minds were reeling with grief for our country and those who had lost lives or loved ones and all whose lives had been forever scarred by this horrific crime.

True stories circulated of murder, torture, devastation, and complete disregard for precious human lives that were left in the rubble that day, but Americans didn’t give the terrorists the expected response of living in fear. Instead, we banded together, bringing help for survivors and for the families of those who had been horrifically murdered in the attack. We linked arms and began rebuilding. All across the country, American flags waved proudly from storefronts, from atop high buildings, in car windows, and in the back of pickup trucks driving down the road.
I remember the constant coverage on television, on the radio, and in the print media. We articulated our grief at cash registers and dinner tables, in classrooms and in our prayers. We aired our pain about this horrific tragedy and pledged to never forget. We brainstormed about what each of us could do to ensure it never happens again.

Our visit to the Twin Towers site took place just after I had spent some weeks preparing for and working in intense anti–human trafficking efforts surrounding the Super Bowl held in East Rutherford, New Jersey. I couldn’t help but make a comparison: Our nation is experiencing another national tragedy. This crime of human trafficking is affecting untold thousands of people through murder, torture, rape, and complete dehumanization.

It is time for our country to link arms, as we did after 9/11, against this crime that not only has occurred but continues to occur, not just in a few places but all across our nation. None of us is immune to human trafficking touching our lives or the lives of those we love. We must work to fight it and keep talking about it; we must take a visible stand against human trafficking. We must provide services for those whose lives have been horrifically affected by this crime committed against them. We must band together to treat them as heroes who have been victimized and honor them for having the courage to endure and finally get help, not treat them as a dirty part of our society we are afraid to touch.

What if instead of condemning them for their “bad choices”—since most never had a choice at all—we as a society embraced them and provided them with driver’s licenses and other basic identification that has been stripped from them? What if we offered them shelter and counseling, even if the pain of their trauma causes them to run time and time again? What if we helped them until they can help themselves, which may take many, many years? What if we worked for better laws to provide services for the victims/survivors and stiff penalties for the traffickers?
All the traffickers ask is that we do nothing. We must never provide them that luxury. We must never forget.

Thankfully, many anti-trafficking groups have sprung up in the United States in the past few years. We are not in a third world country where one can often go to the corner and enlist a police officer’s assistance in finding a brothel or in buying a child for sex. For the most part, our law enforcement officials work hard to uphold the law. If we can do the following things, we can eradicate human trafficking in the United States in our lifetime:

- Raise awareness to the point of the general public knowing what human trafficking looks like and what to do if they see it.
- Adequately educate law enforcement officials and the courts.
- Enact laws that uphold justice against traffickers and sex buyers.
- Provide adequate services for victims and survivors.

I believe if we link arms and do all we can, we can eradicate this atrocity in the United States and around the globe. It is wrong for anyone to be enslaved, no matter where it occurs.

**Modern Slavery**

So what exactly is human trafficking? Why is it sometimes called slavery?

Human trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transporting, obtaining, or maintaining of a person by means of force, fraud, or coercion for purposes of involuntary servitude, debt bondage, slavery, or a commercial sex act or any commercial sex act in which the person performing the act is under eighteen years old. And while the word *trafficking* denotes movement, physical movement is not a requisite. As my friend Lauran Bethell says, trafficking
is the exploitation of vulnerability. Trafficking by its very nature implies movement—and the movement is from vulnerability to the exploitation of that vulnerability.\(^\text{17}\)

Human trafficking, in my estimation, is one of the worst atrocities happening in the world at this time. It is deliberate control, manipulation, force, and torture of a human being whose rights have been overtime by another human being. In fact, it has been officially labeled a form of torture by Halleh Seddighzadeh, a forensic traumatologist and doctoral resident specializing in the psychological treatment of extreme forms of traumatic stress.\(^\text{18}\)

An old adage says, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” One study conducted in Minnesota found that to be true regarding human trafficking. The study showed that for early intervention for female youth, “there was a return on investment of $34 in benefit for each $1 in cost.” The idea that prevention is a huge and valuable part of this work has been confirmed by this study.\(^\text{19}\)

Earlier in this chapter you read about Sarah, a young girl from a nice home being lured into forced prostitution. As sketchy as the statistics are, we know that roughly 800,000 children are reported missing in the United States a year; that equates to roughly 2,200 every day.\(^\text{20}\) A good percentage of those kids wind up as human trafficking victims.

Marc Klaas of KlaasKids, an organization he established in 1994 to give meaning to the kidnap and murder of his then twelve-year-old daughter, Polly Hannah Klaas, told me during my interview with him that the issue of human trafficking is possibly one of the most important issues of our day.\(^\text{21}\) Having created a legacy in her name that will be protective of children for generations to come, he now works tirelessly to raise awareness and help find missing children, some of whom may have been trafficked.

Some—perhaps most—of the children in America who become victims of human trafficking are forced into sex trafficking.
fact, according to Ernie Allen, former president and CEO of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, who spoke before the US House of Representatives, “Researchers also estimated that one-third of street-level prostitutes in the United States are less than eighteen, while half of off-street prostitutes are less than eighteen. With the explosion in the sale of kids for sex online, it is clear that more kids are at risk today than ever before.” As noted earlier in this chapter, as many as one in three teen runaways will be lured into sex slavery within forty-eight hours of leaving home, and the emotional impact on these youngsters is devastating. One study found that 71 percent of trafficked children exhibit suicidal tendencies.

And children represent just one segment of those being trafficked in our country. Individuals are imprisoned (whether bodily or emotionally), often abused physically and sexually, and forced to perform for hours on end for little to no money. If that sounds like slavery to you, you are entirely correct. Indeed, the term human trafficking, which we used to describe Sarah’s situation, is simply a politically correct phrase for what is really modern slavery.

**How Can This Happen?**

Unfortunately, it’s quite simple. There are people motivated by greed and profit who are willing to use others for their financial gain, regardless of the pain and suffering they impose. The fact that few of us suspect—or even believe—that it is happening here gives the traffickers an unparalleled leg up. I have often said that the only thing traffickers ask of us is that we remain silent about this atrocity and do nothing.

Added to that, when trafficking is exposed, the proof required to bring the perpetrators to justice makes prosecution very difficult.
We have much work to do within our legal system so that traffickers may be brought to justice.

In our country’s earlier history, slavery was legal—and even socially acceptable. However, in the 1850s, a slave didn’t come without a cost. Purchasing a slave to work the fields or in the house, no matter how odious that now seems, was quite an investment, with a cost equivalent to about $40,000 in today’s economy. 

Now, 165 years later, the cost of a slave has diminished greatly. Some say the average price is about $100. When I interviewed one ex-pimp, he finished my sentence for me when I began, “The cost of a slave today is . . . ?”

“Nothing,” he asserted. He knew from experience how little he’d paid to acquire sex slaves to work for him.

If we think of an item that costs $40,000, most of us would first envision a vehicle. In doing some research, I found that you can purchase a brand-new Mercedes-Benz C-Class for under $40,000. If you bought a shiny new red Mercedes for $40,000, you would probably be careful how you drove it. You would wash it, maybe even by hand, and regularly give it the tune-ups it needs along with all the recommended maintenance. In short, you would look after it carefully to ensure that your investment was being maintained.

On the other hand, if you could get that same Mercedes for $100 or less, and you knew you could buy as many as you wanted at that price, you would probably simply trade it in for a new model or dispose of it instead of bothering to do the simplest of things like tune-ups or buying new tires. That’s exactly what today’s modern slaveholders do.

Today’s slaveholder reasons that it doesn’t make sense to invest in the maintenance of a slave who can be replaced for a very small amount of money. If a slave will cost the slaveholder a significant amount of time, money, or hassle, the slave is discarded like a broken DVD player not worth repairing.
This principle is graphically portrayed in the 2005 Lifetime miniseries *Human Trafficking*. In one scene, a child sex slave in Manila has developed a high fever. Concerned about the life and health of her friend, another child sex slave in the same seedy brothel attempts to secure medical help for her pal by telling the trafficker about the girl’s condition. The next scene shows the trafficker coming in, picking up the sick preteen, taking her outside the brothel, breaking her innocent neck, and disposing of her body as the first girl helplessly witnesses her friend’s murder.

Slaveholders in the United States may or may not murder their slaves; however, they certainly do not invest in their well-being. Food can be scarce, often just enough to keep the slave alive. Medical care is almost nonexistent. And as with the slavery in our country’s past, regard for human life isn’t even part of the equation.

One of the most popular card games in the Wild West was faro, in which gamblers wagered money, livestock, and slaves. It was a common occurrence for a slave master to return home, pull a slave out of their quarters, and send them to work for the game’s winner.

That hasn’t changed. “Girls can get traded from a card game or dice roll,” says an ex-pimp I interviewed. “You could lose a girl and a girl would have to go. I mean, if you’re in a pimp situation with a prostitute, you should [be able to] say right now, ‘Guess what you get to do, you get to go be with him’ and I’m not talking about dating. ‘You can be with him now for good.’ You should have that much control in theory because of how you set up your life.”

Using people as replaceable commodities is what human trafficking—or modern slavery—is all about. So it’s not surprising to find pimps advertising people like products in big cities and even in small-town USA. In the age of the internet, online listings make this even easier.

An example of one such online ad during the 2014 Super Bowl in New Jersey showed several pictures of a scantily clad young teen.
In Our Backyard

Please note, though the ad sounds like this teen is excited to solicit such an encounter, the pimp or trafficker directs all these ads and requires such “pretty please” attitudes to be portrayed. The ad read:

Hi, you hott, sexy and freaky guys out there looking for fun!
I’m also looking forwards to having some exotic fun. I’m that nice shape petite little lady that you have been wanting to take advantage of all of your life. So if you are one of these guys with you can reach me at ***-***-****.

No private calls or text messages will be answered. Now you are just buttons away. See you soon.

It is difficult to understand the depth of depravity that is required to sell or buy human beings in this manner. Make no mistake, the purpose behind all of this is money. But please don’t confuse it with a legitimate business. This is about the sale of human flesh.

Some ads are much more graphic, with nude photos and detailed descriptions of sexual acts that leave nothing to one’s imagination as the perpetrators try to squeeze the most money out of every pound of human flesh sold. The methods are always changing as these criminals try to stay one step ahead of law enforcement.

Craigslist, which was one of the first online sites to offer these thinly veiled “sex for sale” ads, voluntarily removed its adult services section after pressure by seventeen state attorneys general. In competition for the dollars of those who are buying human flesh, other sites have been developed since the Craigslist adult services closure.

In a 2011–12 effort led by then president of the National Association of Attorneys General, Washington State Attorney General Rob McKenna pressured another online site, Backpage, to remove sex ads. Backpage has repeatedly refused to discontinue the ads, from which they make a purported $22 million per year off of those who are, more often than not, sex-trafficked individuals. McKenna said, “It will take a cultural shift to change attitudes about prostitution.
People look at prostitution and think it’s a choice, but there are very few, if any, volunteers. The more we learn about sex trafficking, the more we believe it is dominated by individuals exploiting both children and adults.”

One can only hope that the people who control those websites will wake up to the reality that they are, in fact, accessories to the crime. I would ask them—and you—to compare the online ad above with this slave auction flyer from 1829:
You'll note that in addition to the sale of slaves, commodities are also advertised on the poster. Similarly, one can shop for furniture, clothing, food, jobs, and other items on many websites selling sex.

**Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)**

Fortunately, trafficking victims, survivors, and those of us trying to help them now have some laws that can help bring justice to perpetrators and provide some services for victims. The judicial process has begun, but there is still a tremendous need for better laws and more services.

In the mid-1990s the US government began to recognize the need for laws to specifically address the crime of human trafficking. Congressman Chris Smith of New Jersey has been a champion against human trafficking and authored the original Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), which was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 2000. It has since been updated and will continue to be updated to provide better protection from, prevention of, and prosecution of the crime of human trafficking. Victims and survivors now have legal rights as well as access to services. Those perpetuating these crimes within our borders and American citizens who travel outside the United States for sex tourism can be criminally prosecuted.

**Stopping Demand**

Ultimately, however, one of the main keys to stopping human trafficking extends beyond the legal system to all of us. In the universal law of supply and demand, if there were no demand, there would be no need for supply. Consumers insisting on manufactured or
agricultural product lines that can be proven to be free of slave labor, for example, can reduce labor trafficking and help eliminate the sale of slave-produced products.

Sex trafficking is particularly dependent on demand. Without consumers viewing pornography online, without sex buyers willing to pay for sex, there would be no need for sex-trafficked individuals. Just like one can shop online for clothing, online sex ads allow the sex buyer many choices. When buying a human for sex, they can choose based on age, the color of skin or hair, or particular fetishes. They will have more choices than if one were going online to buy a shirt from a large online mall. As long as people are sold like a commodity for sexual services and buyers continue to frequent those ads, the demand for human beings will continue.

Helping to Stop Human Trafficking

The question is: What are we going to do about this unconscionable situation?

We will probably each have a different answer to that question because we are each different individuals with different talents and gifts. As for myself, I am working to increase awareness and partnering with legislators, law enforcement, and other organizations to fight this atrocity among us.

I would also like to challenge you to ask, “What am I supposed to do to help fight this abomination?” I can’t answer that question for you, but I have listed below the first of many suggestions you will find in this book. Some will take short amounts of time, while others will require more effort. All will help the fight against human trafficking.

For example, volunteering even limited time with nonprofit organizations effectively fighting the crime of human trafficking does

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more to help than you could possibly imagine. At our local chapter of Oregonians Against Trafficking Humans (OATH), we couldn’t do nearly as much without the help of two of our volunteers.

Kristina is a quiet, busy young woman who, with her husband, owns and operates a successful and rapidly growing karate school. They allow us to use that space for occasional meetings. Kristina helps me whenever I’m challenged with clerical duties (which is often). She also makes phone calls, oversees other volunteers, edits copy, and even designs knockout posters and flyers. In the few hours a week she puts in, Kristina has even connected us with an accountant who has donated services to our organization. She has a knack of looking for and tending to things that need to be done. In and of themselves, her deeds may seem small, but they add up to a huge contribution to our organization.

Another volunteer is Christi, a single mom who works hard to support her children and who would be busy with even half the things she does. She serves one of our organization’s most vital functions by regularly sending reminders and supporting our “viral” efforts to get the word out about events via email, Facebook, and other social media. When we had a large event, Christi distributed the majority of hundreds of our posters. I teased her that she’s never met a blank space on a wall that she didn’t think deserved a poster.

Christi and Kristina are strong soldiers in this fight against human trafficking. Countless numbers of people and leads come to us as a result of their efforts to spread the word about stopping human trafficking in our area. They’re a vital part of our work. Their selfless efforts have helped to rescue victims and save lives. While these two women are local heroes to me, even small, one-time acts such as making phone calls, allowing a poster to be hung in your business, or writing a letter to Congress can help make a significant difference.
Although not everyone can or wants to donate time, monetary contributions can be just as important. Antislavery awareness organizations and groups that aid in the recovery and rehabilitation of newly freed slaves share a common and desperate need for funding. Educating the public about human trafficking, freeing individual slaves, and providing care and rehabilitation for survivors isn’t cheap. The only way these organizations can continue their work is through generous donations from concerned people. Even small, regular donations of $10 a month help give antislavery organizations financial stability and can be more effective than paying hundreds or even thousands of dollars to participate in a short-term effort overseas. When you cheerfully give either time or money to antislavery organizations, you become a partner in the fight against human trafficking.

We often hear objectionable activities protested with the chant “Not in my backyard.” There is even an acronym—NIMBY—for that saying. However, the truth is that human trafficking is already happening in your backyard and mine. Until we acknowledge not only that modern slavery happens but that it’s occurring under our noses, and until we are willing to speak up when we see something that looks like it might be human trafficking, this atrocity will continue.

For Discussion

1. How would you define human trafficking or modern slavery?

2. If Sarah had been informed about human trafficking and how a trafficker grooms a potential victim, do you think she would have fallen prey to Maggie and Ace? Why or why not?
3. What could you personally do to help your community become aware that modern slavery exists?

4. Find a recent news item that concerns human trafficking and discuss it.
   - How could it have been prevented?
   - How can you help prevent a similar situation from occurring in your community?
   - Who can you have a conversation with to make a difference?