

Editor's Preface

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Much has been reported about the very real problem of human trafficking. When I first began learning about human trafficking, I had no idea what it really was. Sure, I had heard of it before, and I knew it wasn't a good thing. However, I was of the mindset that many people in the United States and around the world are familiar with; it doesn't happen here, and it doesn't happen to anyone I know, so it isn't my problem. That statement couldn't be further from the truth.

What many people fail to realize, and what I failed to realize myself, is that human trafficking is a worldwide epidemic, and it does indeed happen here. In the United States. TODAY. The problem doesn't only exist among immigrants from other countries, either; children are commonly trafficked, both for sex and for labor, in the United States every day, and a great deal of them are runaways. That's right; runaway children. The "girl next door" or the "boy next door" could very well be the next "missing child", and that same missing child may be picked up by someone who simply wants to be their friend, help them out, find them a job, give them a place to sleep or something to eat...and that's where the story begins.

Within the pages of this book, you will find research from master's degree holding or seeking students who have put a great deal of time and effort into bringing human trafficking to the forefront and exposing it for the ugly atrocity that it is. These students have unearthed some very disturbing facts, trends and information that indicate human trafficking is far from a thing of the past. Human trafficking is growing exponentially, both domestically and in foreign lands, due to its very lucrative appeal to those who would seek to hold men, women and children as slaves strictly for profit. According to the Polaris Project, the International Labor Organization indicated that 2014 estimates of income for forced labor and human trafficking were expected to reach or exceed \$150 billion worldwide. Estimates from the United Nations and the United States Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) indicate that approximately 20.9-30 million people are enslaved in the world today; this means more people are currently held as slaves today than at any point in human history. Are you interested now?

Our hope is that, from reading the research contained within this book, you will obtain the knowledge that this problem is not just one person's problem; it is every person's problem. We can all make a difference, but it has to start with being aware of this illegal and atrocious act, understanding the risks and dangers involved, and becoming active in attempting to eradicate it. After all, isn't that we truly are anyway? Just human beings trying to survive in a difficult world? The people who are victims of trafficking were simply looking for a better way of life, and became involved in a very ugly game of cat-and-mouse where there are few winners; the only ones coming out ahead are the traffickers themselves.

I became involved in human trafficking thanks to a course I took at Florida Gulf Coast University, which was (and still is) taught by Dr. Johnny McGaha. Through this course, and through numerous videos, papers and discussions, I learned that human trafficking is a disease that is infecting our society, and not unlike any other type of disease, the cure is found within us. This is a huge, worldwide, greed-fed scourge, and I learned that simply being a voice and reaching one person can make a difference. I have now made it a goal to speak out about human trafficking as much as possible, mainly through social media, but also by talking about it. I speak with my friends and family about it. I shout it from the rooftops to everyone I know. I read as much as I can, including information from the Polaris Project, Shared Hope International, Redefining Refuge, the United States Trafficking in Persons Report, Free the Slaves, Truckers Against Trafficking, and Hagar International, among other sources. I now practice what I preach, and I do it often, in efforts to make this problem known.

So what can you do? Learn. Learn about what to look for in order to identify a trafficking victim. Learn what you can do to help. Learn about volunteering or offering financial assistance if you can. Most importantly, learn how to speak out for those who have no voice. Trafficking victims are some of the most exploited, abused, neglected, and overlooked members of society and many of them are "hiding in plain sight." We can help put an end to this terrible existence for them, and we can provide shelter, clothing, food, medical assistance, and other basic needs to these victims. But we have to start by looking at ourselves in the mirror and wanting to be the change we wish to see in the world. It begins, and ends, with us.