

This article originally appeared in the March/April 2010 issue of *Horizons*, the magazine for Presbyterian Women. To order a copy of the full issue on human trafficking, call 800/524-2612 and request item HZN10210; to subscribe to *Horizons*, call 866/802-3635.

Shackles in Our Midst

How to Recognize Trafficking

BY KACIE MACDONALD

You've just heard about the millions of people who are victims of trafficking. And you've heard about the various work environments that facilitate this modern-day slavery. These shocking facts are even more appalling given that 150 years ago, America's bloodiest war was fought to abolish slavery officially.

I often hear protests of, "If there are so many slaves in the United States, why don't I know about them or see them?" I counter, "How hard are you looking? How hard are you listening for voices straining beneath 150 years of hidden bonds?" Until recently, Americans have not known much about this issue, but we can no longer afford to pretend it doesn't exist. It does exist, in large and small communities throughout our country. We must learn to recognize it in order to bring an end to this atrocity.

El Monte Sweatshop

In the mid-1990s, 72 people from Thailand came to El Monte, California, lured by false promises of good jobs in a textile factory. Upon arriving, they found themselves forced to work long hours in squalid conditions for little to no pay. They were denied control of the small amount of money they did have, living in debt bondage. They were not allowed to leave the premises of the apartment complex that served as factory and living quarters. Nor were they permitted to contact their family members back home.¹

The victims' situation persisted for several years. From the outside, the apartment complex looked like any other industrial building except for one key factor—the razor wire on the fence was facing in. It was meant to keep people *in* rather than keep people *out*.



Icon Images/Neil Webb

Domestic Servitude

"Rose" (not her real name) could not believe her good fortune! She was promised school, lodging and sponsorship for college—her personal version of the American Dream. Upon arriving at her new residence, however, she found, instead, her version of hell. Rose was forced to cook all the meals for her new "family" and clean and perform all household duties. She slept in a small closet off the kitchen, just big enough for a small, thin mattress. If she refused to perform expected tasks she was beaten; the father of the family raped her several times a week. She was allowed out of the house only to take out the garbage, and then only under watch.

Several times, the police were called to intervene in domestic disturbances at the house, but no one asked about the quiet, fearful girl in the corner who never said a word. Eventually, a police detective who was

Learn More About Campaigns and Organizations



Rescue & Restore Campaign

www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking/

A campaign of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services'

Administration for Children and Families, to end human trafficking and offer support services to victims of trafficking



Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking

www.castla.org

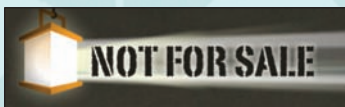
A not-for-profit organization formed in response to the El Monte sweatshop case; it provides social and legal services for victims of trafficking, as well as outreach and advocacy



Free the Slaves

www.freetheslaves.net

An organization committed to ending slavery through the advocacy of individuals, organizations, businesses and governments



Not For Sale Campaign

www.notforsalecampaign.org

A campaign to equip and mobilize people to help end modern-day slavery; this campaign also holds an Investigator's Academy, which trains individuals to identify and report instances of human trafficking. Visit <http://nfsacademy.org> to learn more.

called to the house for another domestic disturbance noticed that something about Rose seemed out of place and decided to investigate, leading to Rose's freedom.²

In Plain Sight

In late 2009, a group of women at Lexington, Kentucky church launched an anti-trafficking initiative in their community. The women began studying their local newspaper's classified section for any suspicious advertisements. After watching for just a few months, they noticed a strange pattern among advertisements for massage parlors.

The massage parlors kept the same name but each week listed a new address, or they kept the same address but listed a new name—indications of unsavory activities. The women continue to monitor the papers, and have contacted the Not For Sale campaign (see sidebar) for other signs for which to watch, and to learn which authorities to contact when. Massage parlors are widely known in the modern abolitionist movement as establishments that may appear to be legitimate businesses, but which use trafficked individuals to service their customers.

Steps to Recognizing Human Trafficking

These tragically too-common-but-true stories share a few similarities. All took place in the United States of America. All took place in the twenty-first century. And all took months or years for the slavery to be exposed. Here are four specific things you can do to help.

Step 1: Pay attention to your intuition.

If something feels off, it probably is. Many times, after incidents of trafficking become public knowledge, neighbors or passers-by admit that they knew there was something wrong, but didn't know why or what to tell authorities.

Step 2: Learn to recognize signs of force, fraud or coercion.

You may be wondering whether a certain situation is really trafficking/modern-day slavery since often there are no physical chains or bonds involved. Common to all stories of trafficking is the element of coercion—the threat of force or harm to a person, their friends or family. This alone is enough to keep someone in bondage.

- Do the people seem fearful?
- Are they doing the work they thought they would be doing?
- Can they leave the premises of their work and living areas?
- Do they have control of their money and identification documents?
- Do they speak English?

Step 3: Learn the indicators of businesses that traffic.

- Is the barbed wire pointing in, rather than out?
- Are there bars on the inside of the windows?
- Are the curtains ever opened?
- Are there many people coming and going at all hours?
- Does anyone ever come out of the building?
- Does the establishment have a constant stream of new employees? (Some places rotate trafficked people and change staff every few days to avoid detection.)

Step 4: Learn the signs and patterns of over-controlling relationships.

Does the individual

- appear to feel that she/he cannot say no or get out of a relationship?
- appear especially fearful or anxious?
- isolate him/herself, or seem “shut down”?
- seem secretive?
- have a sudden change of personality and behavior?
- keep odd hours?

To recognize human trafficking is to understand that it is happening today across the United States—and more than likely in our own communities. More important is to understand that we can do something about it. Taking a stand against

human trafficking does not have to wait for the government or the “trained professional.” By knowing about the issue and refusing to ignore it, *we* can bring about change. 🍀

Kacie Macdonald will graduate with a master’s degree in social work in May 2010 from Asbury College, where she is involved in the campus’s modern-day abolitionist group. She has worked with anti-trafficking issues in California and Kentucky.

Notes

1. George White, “Workers Held in Near-Slavery, Officials Say.” *LA Times*. August 3, 1995.

2. Kevin Bales, *Ending slavery: How We Free Today’s Slaves* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 2007), 5–9.

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Resources

Hands That Heal: International Curriculum to Train Caregivers of Trafficking Survivors

Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAAST)

Curriculum from a Christian perspective that trains caregivers of trafficking survivors; focuses on defining trafficking, meeting emotional and spiritual needs, examples of care and community and family issues. Includes printed booklet and CD-ROM; available in various editions.

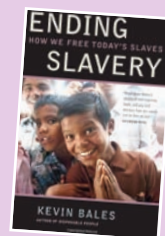
Order from FAAST, 888/466-4673, ext. 127, or faat@worldhope.net; suggested donations: community-based edition, \$30; academic edition, \$45; both editions, plus bonus material, \$75



Ending Slavery: How We Free Today’s Slaves

By Kevin Bales
Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 2007

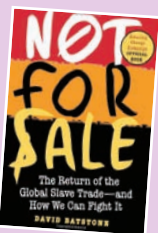
A guide for individuals and organizations who want to become part of the solution to ending human trafficking



The Sacred Bath: An American Teen’s Story of Modern Day Slavery

By Theresa Flores
Bloomington, Ind.: iUniverse, 2007

A personal account of living in sexual slavery in the suburbs of Detroit



Not for Sale: The Return of the Global Slave Trade—and How We Can Fight It

By David Batstone
New York: HarperCollins, 2007

Interviews with and profiles of people who are victims of human trafficking and people who are engaged in the struggle to end modern slavery



Fields of Mudan

Written and directed by Stevo Chang
Tallahassee, Fl.: Florida State University Film School, 2006

A short film about a young Chinese girl named Mudan, who is forced into child prostitution; learn more, including where to buy, at www.fieldsofmudan.com.