



INSIDE IOWA'S HUMAN



SOLD

TRAFFICKING INDUSTRY

By Mina Takahashi

It was only a month into school when Heather met her first college boyfriend. She had grown up in a small town in Iowa, raised by an upper middle class family.

“I was head over heels in love, and he seemed to be showing interest too. Now, I never really dated in high school. I was a bigger girl and very self-conscious. I never thought I was pretty enough or skinny enough. A few chats with this guy and pretty soon we were inseparable. I lived on campus at the time, but I spent much of my time at his house. Things were great,” Heather said.

In her free time, Heather would often go to the mall, spending excessive amounts of money.

“Shopping was my therapy. I even dropped money on a last minute spring break trip with some girlfriends to Florida. When I returned from the trip, my boyfriend approached me about my money issue, and I really couldn’t disagree. I needed to get my spending under control,” Heather said. “At first it started out with him taking my debit card. No debit card, no shopping. I was cool with that because I knew I really did need to start saving money. Next it was controlling how much money I could have each week. Me being naive, I bought right into it. I needed a budget,”

But the control for the money didn’t stop there.

“Eventually I was lucky to get five dollars a week and most of the time I only got that because I returned pop cans. It got to the point I couldn’t even buy my own toiletries. He had to control the money,” Heather said.

It wasn’t until a few months of dating for Heather to truly see that she was being taken advantage of.

“I was his girl. When we would go to the house, I would see the other girls lying, waiting for their next customer or their next beating. All I knew was that at the end of my shift, I would get to go home. I would be able to attend my classes and work,” Heather said.

According to Abolishing Injustice in the 21st Century, (A21) there are 27 million victims of human trafficking today. Once trafficked, the average lifespan of a victim is seven years, with only a 1-2% rescue rate. Even in Iowa, the National Human Trafficking hotline receives hundreds of calls each year. According to the A21 Organization, the average age of a human trafficking victim is 12 years old. Often, trafficking victims are students under 18 who are performing commercial sex acts, a minor with a noticeably older boyfriend, not free to come and go, someone who is homeless or has a history of running away, works excessively with unusually long hours and has unreasonable chores and duties, no healthcare, no money or identification, appears lost or confused and has high security measures at work or home. In addition, any

anyone who seems fearful, anxious, depressed or submissive and shows signs of physical or sexual abuse such as bruises, barcodes or name tattoos could possibly be a victim of trafficking.

Human trafficking victims often believe they are being comforted and given power and financial support, but many never see the money that was promised to them. A victim may see trafficking as an escape from an unhappy home life or their low self esteem. People who seem to have an unstable life are targeted most often, as their past abuse, neglect or exploitation can make them more susceptible to traffickers' promises. Traffickers will target men, women, girls and boys, charging a global average of \$90 per victim. According to the International Labour Organization, human trafficking is a \$32 billion dollar industry.

Even the 1-2% of victims who are rescued face many consequences. They may suffer from social alienation, exclusion, anger, PTSD or Stockholm Syndrome. These effects are often caused by the manipulative methods of the traffickers; perpetrators will sometimes hold a victim captive, starve and abuse them, keep them in isolation and expose them to drugs and alcohol, making them feel guilt, rage, numbing and extreme stress. These symptoms will often make one crack under the pressure and fall into the mental state of "learned helplessness." This is the goal of the trafficker, turning a human into a slave.

Due to her overwhelming feelings of isolation and powerlessness, Heather struggled to escape trafficking.

"These men and women have so much control over you that you fear for your life," Heather said.

In addition to the depression and anxiety that sticks with the vic-

tim, substance abuse and a weakened immune system may often occur as a result of human trafficking and an increased chance of developing STDs or HIV/AIDS.

Children in particular are vulnerable to the consequences of human trafficking. Perpetrators often destroy the child's physical and mental health, leading to daily severe trauma, causing them to become anti-social, aggressive, distrustful and can turn to self-harm and substance abuse.

"I was forced to do things I can never undo; I have seen things that I will never un-see. I still have nightmares," Heather said.

Teresa Davidson was inspired to join the fight against human trafficking after participating and leading many mission trips. One of her most memorable moments was while she was on a mission trip in the red light district of Pune, India. She had just walked into a brothel where a mother was prostituting herself, trying to convince her teenage daughter to join her in the business. Her daughter did not want to participate, but felt she had no choice. However, Teresa and the local missionary assured the young girl that she had hope, telling her she had other options. It wasn't until a few nights later that the team saw a change.

"We were at the missionary's house one night when the teenage girl came there, wanting out. It was such a blessing to see this, as it is very rare," Davidson said. "It is definitely a stand-out moment."

Davidson has been a missionary ever since her first short term trip in 1988. In 2013, she went on a life-changing trip to India. Her team ministered to everyone, ranging from women, men, and trans-genders. They then went to Nepal and ministered in a restoration home in the capital city of Kath-

mandu.

"I discovered the pure evil behind the heinous crime of human trafficking, and developed personal relationships with its victims. I will spend the rest of my life fighting this crime and advocating for those caught in its evil grip," Davidson said.

In August of 2016, Davidson founded an organization in Cedar Rapids called Chains Interrupted, a non-profit organization that fights against human trafficking in Iowa. Although this organization has just recently formed, Davidson and other team members have been fighting human trafficking for the last five years.

Chains Interrupted has a Restoration House in Cedar Rapids for survivors of human trafficking. They also use a "Stop the Demand" program for men to educate and hold each other accountable for the demand of pornography and commercial sex. The organization also maintains a coalition that has over 73 community leaders, working together to form a response plan.

"Human trafficking is in many small towns and communities. A lot of teenagers are groomed online. I meet teens every day who have met an older guy online and become his 'girlfriend.' They will do whatever the guy wants to keep him happy and keep the relationship going. At first, these traffickers don't ask for much. But over time, they break down the good relationships in the girl's life, and replace everyone with himself. Soon, the trafficker is the only one she feels she can trust. The only one who "gets her." Over time, he is asking more and more of her. This is something I actually see all the time in kids in our local high schools," Davidson said.

Other organizations in Iowa also work with trafficking victims. Heather connected with Shannon Schott through the Freedom

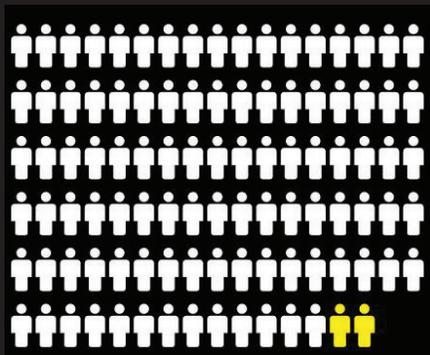
House in Pella, Iowa. Schott works with Amber Lawrence in a Teens Against Human Trafficking program, a student-led organization that seeks to raise awareness about the issue of human trafficking in our schools and communities. This youth-led movement works to eliminate human trafficking in Iowa, empowering students to become lifelong ambassadors in this fight.

This program was started by a high school student in Ankeny, Iowa, who learned about the issue and decided to do something about it. There are now about six to seven active teams and another handful that are just getting started. Students hope to start extracurricular teams in Iowa high schools to provide prevention education on identifying and connecting victims with appropriate local services.

Schott is the Teens Against Human Trafficking representative for the Iowa City region, working to form teen prevention and awareness groups in local high schools, as students are the best advocates to raise awareness and teach other students how to identify signs human trafficking.

Teens Against Human Trafficking provides schools and students with the training, tools, and information they need to lead prevention efforts within their communities. Teens Against Human Trafficking teams, or clubs, creatively brainstorm ways to raise awareness, help victims, and prevent human trafficking in their community.

Besides learning about prevention and trafficking awareness, Teens Against Human Trafficking Clubs make t-shirts and bracelets, show community documentaries, reach out to high-risk youth and bring donations to shelters, write articles for local newspapers, make posters and participate in 5ks and



ONLY 1-2% OF VICTIMS ESCAPE

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

72 CASES

OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING WERE REPORTED TO THE IOWA HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOTLINE IN 2016

fundraisers. The clubs meet regularly, spending some time at the beginning learning about the issue. After that, students can choose if they wanted to focus on awareness in the school first or work on a larger community event.

Outside of a school club, teenagers can donate to food pantries or the Salvation Army, join rescue and restoration units, mentor youth in shelters, and educate themselves and others how to recognize a victim. In addition, adults can become foster parents or adopt children. About 70% of victims were in the foster care system, and a third of all runaway teenagers are lured into prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home.

Other students raise awareness about human trafficking by participating in End It Day, which this year is on February 23rd. By simply drawing a red X on the back of their hand, they hope to spread awareness about human trafficking and the End It Movement's fight for freedom. Also, the X can be shared on social media, using #EndItMovement. The red X has been shared over 500 million times. In addition to the X, the End It Movement also sells apparel with the X. The movement accepts donated websites for a day to promote their message "shine a light on slavery." Students can also sign up to become a campus representative at their school to join the fight for freedom.

Some Iowa students help anti-trafficking efforts by taking part in Dresseember, an annual campaign that uses fashion to raise money for organizations that fight human trafficking, enabling anyone to become an anti-trafficking advocate. By wearing a dress or tie for every day in December, participants advocate for the dignity of all women, especially those who have been exploited. Elise Mance

is a community member who has been participating in Dresseember for three years.

"The first time I participated in Dresseember, I really had no idea what I was doing. I set a goal of raising \$1,000, not knowing if I would even make it half-way, but knowing I wanted to aim high. Each time someone donated, I was almost shocked. After I reached that first Dresseember goal, I felt so empowered: empowered to help others and empowered to take risks without fearing failure," Mance said.

Mance also has a fundraising page, where all proceeds raised goes to the International Justice Mission and A21, two organizations that work globally to fight human trafficking, restore victims and prosecute offenders.

"As I became aware of the issue of human trafficking, I knew it was something I cared deeply about. In my own personal experience, having a voice and being able to stand up for myself when I was the victim of abuse was very important. I decided to participate in Dresseember because it gave me the opportunity to be a voice for other victims who had none. just couldn't stop thinking, 'What if that was me, what would I want someone to do?' This is a small way for me to make a difference by being a voice and spreading the word about human trafficking," Mance said.

Both the International Justice Mission and A21 inspired Mance because of their hard work and dedication to prosecute offenders and aid victims.

"I love hearing rescue stories from these two organizations. The work they are doing to educate, protect, rescue, and restore victims while prosecuting offenders gives me hope for the future. And I know that I, and everyone else who donates to Dresseember, is a part of

that work," Mance said.

Mance's goal this year has been to share the campaign with new people. Besides raising money, Mance strongly believes that education and awareness are equally as powerful.

"If I talk to someone about Dresseember, and they walk away being more concerned about human trafficking and more aware of the issue, to me that is just as important as if that person had donated," Mance said.

Although Dresseember is only one month long, Mance continues working to fight human trafficking all year long.

"When Dresseember isn't going on, I keep up with the ongoing work of the International Justice Mission and A21 through their social media accounts. I think it's important to keep this issue in mind all year, not just once a year. I also think it's important to share what's happening so others can be aware. I especially want my donors to know that their money is going toward some really great things," Mance said.

Mance hopes that her efforts to spread the message that each person is equally valuable and important will help change people's lives for the better.

"The problem of human trafficking stems from a lack of value. People's lives are devalued on the most basic level, and therefore it somehow becomes okay to sell them like property and use them as a means to an end. Each life is equally worthy of respect, dignity, and the right to freedom from exploitation. I can't single-handedly end modern day slavery, but I can join a movement of other people all fighting for the same thing, and together, we can make a change."

Although Heather is not to the point in her journey of sex trafficking, she would like to make clear that sex trafficking can happen to anyone.

"I grew up in an upper middle class family. I was a popular kid who thought she had it all," Heather said. "Don't think that this can't happen to you,"

In addition, she emphasizes the importance of maintaining control over yourself and your possessions, especially if they are a significant other. If you do know someone in need of help, speak up.

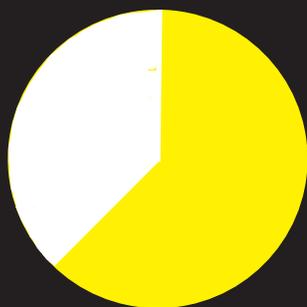
"I didn't speak up, and I have to live with the consequences," Heather said.

Also, always keep an open line of connection with your friends and family. Check in with them daily. Finally, never meet up with a stranger alone.

"Sex trafficking can be by anyone. I've encountered doctors, cops, lawyers and CEOs. These people are looking for escorts and the traffickers provide the meals. Big events especially draw a lot of traffickers into the area," Heather said.

While Heather's trafficking experience was scarring, she has not let it define her. Instead, she uses her experience to educate and save others.

"This is not even the beginning of my story," Heather said. "I was still able to graduate with honors while I remained as property to a man. I am not sharing this for sympathy or attention. I am sharing this to save lives. No one deserves to be controlled, to be used and abused. I am sharing this because it can happen to you, and chances are someone you know is or will be part of a sex ring if we don't speak up and speak out," Heather said.



**OF THOSE
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MINORS**

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HAVE A TRAFFICKING TIP?

CALL 1-888-373-7888