

THE TRUE STORY OF A SEX TRAFFICKING SURVIVOR

KATARIINA ROSENBLATT, PHD

with CECIL MURPHEY



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Published by Revell a division of Baker Publishing Group P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287 www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

ISBN 978-0-8007-2345-3

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To protect the privacy of individuals who are still living, some names and details have been changed. The following is the author's personal recollection of the events of her life.

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Dedicated to all survivors of abuse and sex trafficking. May God fill you with hope and set you free forever.

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Why Was I a Victim of Human Trafficking?

ex trafficking doesn't happen here," people often say, especially those from small towns. If it doesn't happen where they live, they're not personally affected. "It's a terrible thing," they admit, but it's also removed from them.

Or so they want to believe. And yet, sex trafficking happens everywhere, and no city or small town is immune. It happens to victim-prone children. For me it occurred in Miami, but it could have happened to any girl or boy in Cub Run, Kentucky, or Cedar Falls, Iowa.

My cowriter, Cecil Murphey, wasn't caught in human trafficking—but even in Iowa where he grew up, he easily could have been lured into the sex trade. He had many of the same problems and conflicts as I did.

He also fit the profile. Every story is different; each victim and survivor has a distinctive experience, but most of us can be profiled easily enough. And it's not a gender issue. The problems and needs of me (a female) and Cec (a male) weren't much different. Our dissimilarities revolve around what happened *after* our early molestation.

I tell a little of Cec's history because too many people assume that in human or sex trafficking, predators want only girls. That's not true. In my organization (There Is H.O.P.E. For Me, Inc.) I have seen firsthand that at least one-third of sex slaves are boys.



Who are we? Why us?

We who were victimized didn't know healthy ways to cope with others. Usually, we were the loners, the outcasts, the shy, the overweight, or the smaller kids. Because we were needy children, perpetrators sensed that vulnerability. Most of us didn't meet some evil person lurking in the park, and we weren't accosted by a stranger on a dark street.

If those who lured us were strangers, they groomed us by winning our trust before they took advantage of our vulnerability. The point is that we knew our perpetrators and they taught us to trust them.

As you'll read in this book, my horrific childhood made me an excellent candidate. A woman named Mary groomed me—and *grooming* is the correct word. It means the perpetrator won my trust, showered me with attention, and made me feel important and special. That misplaced trust lured me into sex trafficking.

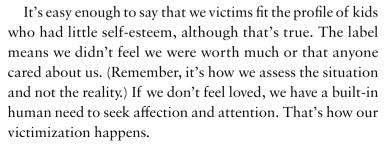
Why did Mary's methods work? Like other victims, I

didn't feel I had anyone who understood or cared. I felt useless and worthless. When my new friend Mary asked questions, listened to my answers, and made promises, she implied we would be friends forever. I received the attention I yearned for.

Although every child needs to be loved, the entrapment is more than just expressing affection (even though it's false affection). All children deserve to know they're loved and that they're special to their parents. It's not only whether they *are* loved but also whether they *believe* they are loved. That knowledge makes the difference.

Even though I always knew my mother loved me, she was a victim of my father's physical and verbal abuse. To make it worse, her submission to him was the only role model I had.

—☆—



Several times I contemplated suicide. Another common theme is that most of us didn't learn from our families how to set boundaries or to take control of our lives. As you read my story, you'll realize that my father destroyed my boundaries, and so did those with whom I associated. Before I was out of my teens, I believed that females were inferior to males and deserved mistreatment. Why wouldn't I have been a good candidate for trafficking?

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That's who we were as children: needy, insecure, anxious, lonely, and vulnerable. Without the maturity to make adult decisions, we didn't always know what was right or wrong. Instead, we felt something was wrong *with us* and that we were inferior to other children.

With that background, we wanted to believe our perpetrators' words and promises. When they flattered us, we believed them because we yearned to hear such words.

If you ask us, "How could you allow the abuse to occur?" we don't know how to respond. None of us wanted to be sexually assaulted; we never asked to be victimized. Who wants to be a sex slave? We wanted to feel worthwhile.

Our predators lied to and manipulated us. Worse, we believed their lies. We *needed* to believe someone—anyone cared about us.



Because of my experience and my working directly with American children who have been victims of sex trafficking, I refer to the vulnerability factors that lead to recruitment of American children into sexual slavery.

Here are the most significant:

- abuse within the home, which normalizes that type of maltreatment
- economic disadvantages, such as coming from a singleparent home
- exposure to drugs and alcohol in the home, which makes that lifestyle seem normal
- seeking a father figure to fill a "daddy hole"

Opportunists are out there seeking to exploit genuine needs

for love and affection as well as basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter.

This book is about my experiences. Despite the terrible things that happened, I am one of the lucky ones. I'm a grateful survivor and want to be the voice for those who cannot or will not ever be able to speak for themselves.

Most human trafficking victims don't survive. By the time they reach their twenties, they are worthless to the human trafficking trade. They're either drug-addicted or they become recruiters themselves. Many die from disease, drug overdose, or murder. Sometimes they see that their only way out is through suicide. In many cases, once children are recruited, their families don't hear from them again.

My story recounts a different ending. I survived because I escaped—more than once. The fact that I experienced human trafficking on more than one occasion is a phenomenon that should never have occurred. But once we're hooked into the lifestyle, it takes a great deal of courage and persistence to get out for good. God's pursuing love finally gave me that courage and enabled me to leave and to keep resisting the temptation to go back to slavery.

Many children never escape the life of commercial sexual exploitation. When their traffickers are finished with them, or if they run away, most of them—as I have seen many times become deeply involved in the adult entertainment industry as a way of life. Because of the abuse and exploitation, that's the only lifestyle they have known since childhood.

Just escaping isn't enough, which is a major reason for this book. It took me years to believe in myself and to realize that God wanted me to have a good life that I deserved.

Since I escaped and grew in my faith, God has enabled me

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to use my painful experiences to reach out to those young girls and boys who remain trapped in a life of sex trafficking.



Two things I need to point out:

First, I've tried to tell my story as honestly as I can, and obviously sometimes I can say only how I perceived someone else's actions.

Second, the stories about the girls and the traffickers in this book are true. For the safety of the girls, I have changed their names. Their lives may still be in danger, and I want to do everything I can to protect them.

After reading this book, I hope you'll see the need to help people like me and organizations like There Is H.O.P.E. For Me, Inc. that seek to rescue enslaved children and teens.