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## Human Trafficking and Sexual Slavery: A Local Epidemic

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# Human Trafficking and Sexual Slavery: A Local Epidemic

A senior thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts  
in Humanities and Cultural Studies

By  
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## Abstract

In examining human trafficking, particularly within the sexual slavery realm, it is clear that there is limited awareness regarding how widespread it truly is. This thesis discusses the prevalence of human trafficking within the United States, with a particular focus on sexual slavery and human trafficking occurring in Sonoma and Marin Counties. The story of a local human trafficking survivor is chronicled throughout the thesis, using her incredibly personal story to connect to the larger narrative of the human trafficking victim. The emphasis on local trafficking is meant to open reader's eyes to the reality that sexual slavery is not solely a third-world problem, but a domestic one as well. This thesis is meant to illuminate the dark world of human trafficking and offer ways that the public can aid in helping victims, as well as various ways to become involved in the fight against sexual slavery within our communities.

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## ***Introduction***

My interest and devotion to the subject of human trafficking started when I was 18 years old. In my teenage years, I was a rather rebellious and naïve young woman who was enamored of the ritzy lifestyles and apparent wealth of young, urban men. My group of friends and I glamourized and idolized the beautiful women grinding and bouncing on young men depicted in rap videos, and thinking that they had it all, and we wanted to be like them. What we didn't know was how horribly devastating our reverence of those girls would turn out to be.

Growing up in a sheltered, semi-rural part of Sonoma County, I had little to no experience with the darker and evil side of life and, like many teenagers, felt invincible. However, all of this changed in the summer of 2003 when I met a young man whom I shall call Nick (not his real name). I met Nick when I was in San Francisco at an 18-and-older club celebrating my recent birthday. Feeling like the "adult" that I legally was, I had decided that it would be fun to invite my two closest friends and rent a hotel room so we could all stay the night in San Francisco. Unsupervised for the first time in a large city, we felt as if we had finally reached adulthood, were responsible, and were fully in control of the course of our lives. Unfortunately, for one of my friends that night, the course of her life would never be the same, as her life took a turn down an ugly, violent and horrifying path, changing all of our lives forever.

We arrived at the club decked out in our most "mature" clothing and attracted the attention of many men who were loitering in the parking lot of the club. Feeling euphoric from the attention, I began talking a young man who introduced himself as

Nick as he hung out of the driver's side of a new Range Rover. Nick was incredibly handsome, debonair and well-spoken, and as we talked, he asked me who I was with, and I introduced him to my two friends. Saying all the right things and complimenting all of us on our maturity and beauty, he suggested that we leave the parking lot of the club and head back to our hotel room; he would call his friends, and we could have our own party. We all eagerly agreed to the idea and rode back with Nick to our hotel room. Nick's two friends showed up with liquor and weed, and the party began. As the night went on, I noticed that one of Nick's friends, a man he introduced as his cousin Alan (not his real name), was paying an awful lot of attention to my best friend, whom I shall call Lisa (not her real name). Lisa and Alan seemed to be in a world all of their own, and when the night finally ended, and they drove off in Alan's new Mercedes-Benz, Lisa told me that she had never felt so connected to a person in her life. This was the beginning of the end for her. My other friend and I questioned Lisa on how she could feel so strongly for a man that she didn't even know, and she confessed that she herself didn't know, but that he was so unlike any other man that she had ever encountered. The next day, Lisa flew home to Washington, where she was going to college, and less than two months from the day she met Alan, she had dropped out of college, left her life and all her belongings behind in Washington, and was posting provocative pictures of herself on escort web sites all throughout the Bay Area. This dramatic and abrupt shift in the course of her life was all due to Alan, who, unknown to all of us on that fateful night in San Francisco, turned out to be a violent and manipulative human trafficker and pimp.

The story of Lisa is one that is not at all uncommon or out of the ordinary. In fact, there are many other stories and countless methods of enticing and entrapping girls into the life of human trafficking, all tactics that I will touch on in more depth within this piece. Young girls in our communities are being forced, manipulated, and coerced into doing things that they would never do on their own, and I feel that there is not nearly enough education or awareness on this huge epidemic happening right here in our own backyards. I will delve much deeper into the whys, hows, and whos of the dark underworld of human trafficking in the main portion of my paper; however, it is my goal to bring awareness to the prevalence of human trafficking and the painful, horrifying lives that our girls are living.

Lisa lived under Alan's control for six agonizing years, and throughout those years, I was the only person that he allowed her to talk to on a semi-regular basis. While our contact was limited, I was able to experience and learn much about her life as a trafficking victim and feel that it is my responsibility to tell her story. I harbor much guilt and shame about introducing Lisa to Nick and his cousin Alan, and I feel that if I can shed some light on the subject, that perhaps it will save one girl from entering into the life. In 2003, when we were 18, we had no idea what a human trafficker or human trafficking victim was or even looked like, and unfortunately, it is still incredibly challenging to identify, as the traffickers take many precautionary measures to make the victims appear as if they are exploiting themselves of their own free will. However, not all hope is lost, as the identification of victims is becoming more apparent now than it ever has been.

Lisa has never spoken about her six years as a human trafficking victim publicly or with others, out of shame and fear of retaliation from Alan, hence the aliases of all those involved. Her bravery and courage to survive and persevere despite the extreme adversity that she has endured makes her the toughest and most resilient woman that I have ever been fortunate enough to know, let alone call my best friend. While her story, as you will see, turns out to have a beautiful ending, many other girls are not so fortunate and end up psychologically and physically scarred, drug dependent and often dead. These are the girls who need and deserve advocacy. My goal is to bring their stories to light, with the help of Lisa's story as the common bond and thread that carries you, the reader, through the life of a human trafficking victim.

In approaching my research for this piece, I used Lisa's experience as a main source of primary evidence. I have had countless conversations with her about her experiences with Alan, and feel that I have a strong sense of what she endured. I helped her leave him two separate times after she endured beatings so bad that she was unrecognizable, and I helped talk her through her feelings of extreme shame and embarrassment when she came home for the final time. I also sit on the Sonoma County Human Trafficking Task Force, along with Lisa, and try to attend as many monthly meetings as my schedule allows. Through the Human Trafficking Task Force and through my mom, who works for the Santa Rosa Police Department, I met a brilliantly passionate detective whom I will refer to as Detective Smith (not his real name). Detective Smith is the head of the Sex Crimes and Domestic Violence division, with a focus on child exploitation and human trafficking. He was the first person within Sonoma County to

focus on human trafficking and its ramifications and prevalence within our community. I have spoken in depth with Detective Smith about his interaction with both traffickers and victims, and his extensive knowledge in the field was invaluable when gathering information for this project. Having an individual in law enforcement as a source has been incredible, as it opened up my accessibility to an arena that usually goes untapped by the public. His view of the girls and women who have been trafficked has redefined the way that the police department and its officers view the prostitutes that they had been encountering on the streets. He humanized the women who had previously been demonized and allowed the patrol officers to see the women through a different lens. Whereas they previously identified the girls as willing members of a crime, they now see them as the victims that they are, and can access and facilitate the use of resources if the girls choose to accept help. I will talk more about Detective Smith and his impact, as I get further in to this piece.

When researching information regarding human trafficking within the United States, and particularly within California, I found that the Internet yielded the greatest amount of relevant and reliable information. I was able to find articles such as *It Can't Happen in My Backyard: The Sexual Exploitation of Girls in the United States*, which offers a wealth of information that was relevant to my project. The Federal Bureau of Investigations has a generous amount of information regarding human trafficking, along with great statistics that help support my assertion that human trafficking is a very real and growing epidemic. Websites like *trafficking.org* and *PolarisProject.org* also have

information regarding the definition of human trafficking, current statistics, warning signs, and information on legislation in regards to combating human trafficking.

Because this project and topic is so close to my heart, I found it challenging to keep my focus on the larger narrative of the human trafficking victim and not solely to focus on Lisa's story. While her story is one that is recurring within the Bay Area and surrounding areas, there are many, many more stories that are dissimilar to hers in the sense that they were not as lucky to escape. Furthermore, the life that Lisa led up until her recruitment into human trafficking was fairly normal by all accounts, although there were some factors that made her more susceptible to persuasion and coercion by Alan. As you will read, many of the girls who get sucked into human trafficking have been foster children, sexually abused, maltreated by parents or relatives and/or forgotten about by those who were supposed to care for them.

As previously stated, I will use Lisa's story of exploitation and sexual slavery as the common thread that connects all human trafficking victims that live amongst us. I think that because her story is one of inspiration and hope, it will inspire others to get involved in the battle against human trafficking. By telling her story and allowing others to see that it can happen to anyone, my hope is that the naïveté that plagued and blinded us when we were younger will fade and the veil of glamour and glitz that attracted us will be uncovered and exposed for what it truly is.

### ***What is Human Trafficking and why is it Important?***

When posed the question, “Does human trafficking occur here, in Sonoma and Marin Counties?” the majority of the people that I asked answered with an unequivocal “No, absolutely not. Human trafficking is an international or Third World problem, not something that we have here in the United States.” I assert that it is this general consensus that makes the acceptance and acknowledgement of human trafficking in our backyards a very challenging mission to accomplish, particularly because it is such a taboo and dark subject that we do not enjoy associating with sunny, light-hearted California.

Human trafficking is a rather broad term used to define a “criminal business that profits from enslaving people for sexual servitude and forced labor” (What). According to United States Federal Law, human trafficking is defined as:

- The recruitment, harboring, transportation provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjugation to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery; or
- Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained the age of 18 years of age (What)

Similarly, the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime defines human trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, harboring, transfer, or

receipt of persons, by the threat or use of force, by abduction, fraud, deception, inducement, coercion, or the abuse of power, or by giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation irrespective of the consent of the person; exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery or servitude” (Raymond et al. 24).

Human trafficking is also termed modern day slavery, as it is defined in the same way that we previously defined slavery throughout history. While human trafficking deviates from our historic view of slavery, making it hard to conceptualize, the simple fact is that slavery is as much alive today as it was 200 years ago. It is the idea that one’s life, liberty and fortune can be under absolute control of another, and be bought, sold, and/or used at the owner’s will. It is the owning of another individual that makes it identical to the slavery of our past (What).

The national average age of entry into human trafficking is 12-14; however, in California, and even more closely, in the North Bay Area, the average age of recruitment into human trafficking is 16-25 years old (Human).

According to the FBI, human trafficking is the fastest-growing industry in the world today, second only to drug trafficking, having passed arms trafficking, and is expected to become the number one criminal activity in the world. “Judging by news headlines, human trafficking might appear to be a recent phenomenon, however the coerced movement of people across borders is as old as the laws of supply and demand” (Baker

309). What makes human trafficking so incredibly deplorable is that the commodity—human lives—is a renewable source of revenue, in that the same individual can be re-used over and over and over again until he or she is no longer viable (Baker 309). Unlike drugs, human beings can be repeatedly sold and be a perpetual source of wealth for their owners. In addition, what makes this an even more challenging epidemic to combat is that out of the 12.3 million slaves around the world, only 0.4% of them have even been identified, making this a horrific and atrocious violation of individuals' human and civil rights (What). This alarming number of unidentified slaves throughout the world also makes it challenging to identify who is a trafficking victim and who is not. Due to the lack of reported and identified victims, millions of people live like caged animals, either physically or psychologically. It is this underreporting and millions of unknown victims that make it hard to ignore once the facts are laid out. Enlightenment leaves no room for ignorance.

Within California, there is a large population of laborers forced to work in the prolific agricultural industry for little to no pay, under horrible, slave-like conditions (Estimations), and while this is an atrocious assault on their human rights and complete abuse of power, my focus in this piece is on a larger and more personal aspect of human trafficking, that being sexual slavery and sex trafficking of girls and women within the United States, and more connectedly, within California. That is not to say that the issue of forced labor within human trafficking is not an equally important story to tell; however, for the purpose of this particular piece, I simply have a personal link to sex trafficking, and a mission to tell a story that is not often told.

My interest in human trafficking and affiliation with the Human Trafficking Task Force, along with familial connections to the Santa Rosa Police Department, has given me the amazing opportunity to meet a detective whom throughout this piece I will refer to as Detective John Smith (not his real name). Detective Smith has been with SRPD for over 10 years and is the first individual within the department to focus on human trafficking within Sonoma County. He is the lead detective of the Sex Crimes and Domestic Violence Division, with a particular focus on child exploitation and human trafficking, and his vast knowledge and expertise in the field, paired with his willingness to sit with me through countless hours of interviews for this piece, allowed me to get a fuller picture of the extensive human trafficking issues that plague Sonoma and Marin Counties.

There is no doubt that human trafficking exists all over the United States; however, California is a hot spot for domestic trafficking due to its large population, large economy, international borders, extensive ports and major metropolitan regions. California is the **only** state within the US that has three cities which operate as hubs for human traffickers: Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Diego, says Detective Smith. According to the FBI, these California cities are also the highest child sex trafficking areas in the nation. Due to this high number of trafficking victims within California, it is imperative that the public be made aware of what is occurring literally in our backyards and to our girls. Young women and girls are being manipulated into working for men with no value for human life or compassion for others. The only motivator for the

traffickers is money, and they will go to any lengths to acquire it, as we will see in this essay.

### ***Methods of Recruitment***

Who are these perpetrators, and more importantly, who are the victims? The perpetrators and traffickers come from all different cultural and ethnic backgrounds; however, in California, they are typically African-American and Caucasian men ranging in age from 18-50, but can be women as well, who prey upon young girls and women from all walks of life says Detective Smith. They are frequently involved in other types of criminal activity in addition to human trafficking including: welfare fraud, tax evasion, drugs, bank fraud, racketeering, robbery and domestic violence (Raymond et al. 49). They are men who are brilliant manipulators and have the ability to sway the decisions of young, malleable minds. Pimps and traffickers use five incredibly powerful forces to acquire new girls: love, debt, addiction, physical force, and authority (Kennedy et al. 4). These pimps are adept at sensing vulnerabilities in young girls and exploiting their weaknesses to their advantage in the worst ways. Studies have shown that “many pimps are psychopathic, and psychopathy is strongly associated with all types of violence...it has been reported that many pimps beat their women regularly, often without any precipitating factors, to show them who is in control and to keep them so scared that they do not think of attempting to exit the trade” (Kennedy et al. 6). These methods of violence, as you will read later on, were used excessively on the young woman whose

story will be told in this piece. For now, the methods of recruitment will be touched on only briefly.

*Love:* Many women are “turned out” by a boyfriend or pimp with whom they have a deep emotional attachment. Pimps are able to convince girls that they should prostitute themselves because they love them, and that by doing so, they are showing their true love for the pimp. “This form of pimping, in which the girl forms an emotional attachment, is the most desirable method pimps use to recruit new girls. Not only are the girls unlikely to turn on their pimps, whom they ‘love,’ but they are also easier to manipulate and control than women who fear their pimps” (Kennedy et al. 9).

*Debt:* Some pimps will use a form of indebtedness to recruit young girls by giving them clothing, money, drugs and/or gifts under the false guise that the gifts are free. However, after a designated period of time, the girls are informed that they must find a way to repay the large debt that they have unknowingly accumulated (Kennedy et al. 9). If women are unable to pay off their debts to the pimp, a few various scenarios will play out. The girl may feel as if she has no other option than to work the streets as suggested by her new “friend,” she may be encouraged by the pimp’s other girls to prostitute herself, or the pimp may claim that his or both of their lives are in danger if he cannot repay his debtors (Kennedy et al. 9). “Thinking that it would only be a short-term situation until the debt was paid off, the women prostituted themselves...however, the debt never got paid off, no matter how much money the women brought in” (Kennedy et al. 9).

*Drugs:* Addiction to drugs and/or alcohol is a common reason for entering the commercial sex industry. While it differs slightly from being directly approached by pimps and traffickers, as the girls already have addictions and are seeking a way to feed their habit, the final outcome is the same as in human trafficking cases. Drug-addicted women reported sleeping with drug dealers in exchange for drugs. Dealers might put women up in their apartment for a few weeks and supply them with drugs but, soon after, inform them that the only way to continue receiving the drugs was if the girl slept with the drug dealer's friends. Upon doing so and feeling shameful for her actions, the girls' resistance was broken down, and the concept of working the streets to feed her habit was not as bad as it would have been before, as she had already engaged in prostituting herself (Kennedy et al. 10). Drugs are also used to create a dependency on the pimp or to control girls, says Detective Smith, adding that girls who are unwilling to cooperate or comply with the demands of the pimp are drugged, rendering them easier to control and more compliant to customers' demands.

*Physical force and violence:* Violence is an incredibly common occurrence in the world of human trafficking and is used more often than not in order to instill fear and exert control over the girls. Types of control and "violence are used as the basis of exploiting women and girls into prostitution...for most women the battery and prostitution goes hand in hand to initiate women into the commercial sex industry, and to control them after entry (Raymond et al. 57). The "gorilla pimp" is a term used to describe a pimp who rules with primitive-like, violent behavior (Kennedy et al. 10). The gorilla pimp makes no attempt to charm or manipulate his girls; instead, he uses brute

force and intense violence to force his girls to acquiesce to his demands. “Ranging from threats to beatings to straight-out kidnapping, a pimp using this technique never tried to deceive the young woman with promises of love or glamor. He made it clear that her job was to turn tricks on the corner and if she did not follow through, there would be grave consequences to her and her family” (Kennedy et al. 10). Although violence is used commonly in human sex trafficking, this specific method of recruitment is one that is not as commonly used, as it does not evoke much allegiance and loyalty from the girls for their pimp. However, “gorilla tactics” are frequently used after girls have been recruited by the previously stated methods as a form of control and way of instilling fear in the victims (Kennedy et al. 11).

*Authority figures:* One particularly dark method that pimps use to recruit is through the girls’ parents, family members, or caregivers. Girls are forced to work the streets (where they eventually meet pimps) by mothers, fathers, brothers, uncles and foster parents (Kennedy et al. 11). Girls are turned out by their parents to support familial drug habits, sold to family friends or pimps by parents, or are turned out by brothers or cousins who have dealings in the human trafficking market (Kennedy et al. 11). Foster children are also victims of human trafficking as their foster parents sell them to customers in order to make extra money to either support a drug habit or out of sheer evil and greed to make a profit off a helpless girl, according to Detective Smith. The sexual abuse suffered at the hands of those who are supposed to provide care allows girls to trade one form of sexual exploitation for another. It also leaves them numb to

the idea of having sex with others without consent, as they have already been abused and “broken in” by family members.

### ***The Impact of the Internet***

There is no doubt that technology has allowed us as a society to advance in ways that we would have not been able to otherwise. However, with this advancement in technology comes a much darker side of anonymity, exploitation, global connections, and secrecy that allows perpetrators and human traffickers to exploit young girls in ways that they previously were unable to. Whereas before the appearance of the Internet, “working girls” were more visible and easily distinguishable to potential customers, they now can be shielded by technology, creating a façade that they are in control of their decisions, when in actuality, they are human trafficking victims. Websites such as *Eros.com*, *Backpage.com*, *Redbook.com*, and, up until recently, *Craigslist.com*, all facilitate the exploitation of human trafficking victims. In addition, social media sites such as *Instagram*, *Facebook*, *MeetMe* and *KikMessaging* all make the trafficking of young women easier to expedite. “Individuals advertised for commercial sex are often made to appear that they are working independently, when in fact they are victims of sex trafficking more often than is recognized or understood” (Escort). Many women are forced by their traffickers to post provocative and sexually explicit photos of themselves on these various sites, advertising that they are young college students putting themselves through college, Graduate, or Law school. The biographies that the pimps create and force the women to write make the women appear as if they

are willing and eager participants, which only brings in more clientele, when in reality they are trafficking victims, says Detective Smith.

The Internet also allows customers to share and rate the girls that they purchase. Detective Smith tells of numerous sick and twisted forums and review sites such as *Redbook.com* and *Backpage.com*, where men exchange chilling details and information about girls' age, physical characteristics, willingness or unwillingness to participate in sex acts, sexual experience or inexperience, as well as the cleanliness and amount of surveillance at the apartment, brothel or building that they patronized. "The Internet has been identified as the number one platform that pimps, traffickers, and johns currently use for buying and selling women and children for sex in the United States" (Escort). The girls take all the risk, while the traffickers reap all the rewards.

In addition to creating a forum where trafficking victims and buyers can set up face-to-face meetings, the Internet also "fosters the exploitation of young women and girls in areas where prostitution is either legal or more likely to be tolerated" (Hodge 147). "The United States is home to the Internet-based pornography business, a medium that has opened up new opportunities for traffickers to exploit women. Video conferencing technology allows real-time transmission of events to essentially anywhere in the world. One of the first uses of this technology was the live transmission to buyers of girls being sexually abused" (Hodge 147). Live, real-time Internet sex shows are provided for a fee, with buyers able to request any and all sex acts to be performed on young girls and women as they watch (Hodge 147). In addition, pimps locate Internet sites in different

nations with less restrictive laws, with resulting images sold to customers in the United States, the largest market for Internet pornography (Hodge 147).

The anonymity of the Internet that shields pimps and traffickers from law enforcement also shields the buyers of human trafficking victims in the sense that it can hide the financial exchange that the buyers of young girls engage in. Code words are used to hide the true intent of the interaction between the girl and the buyer. Terms such as “donations,” “gifts,” or “contributions” are used to mask the payment of sex, says Detective Smith. There is also code language used to hide the actual act of sex, with traffickers and buyers using language that indicate commercial sex acts without explicitly stating them (Escort).

However, as well as the traffickers do in concealing their identities via the Internet, Detective Smith says that law enforcement is also using the Internet to their advantage and gaining ground on identifying them and, in turn, creating databases that track and record traffickers’ movement and methods of trafficking. He adds that local law enforcement agencies also connect with the Federal Bureau of Investigations to compare notes and exchange information regarding local and national traffickers’ techniques and methods. This networking of various agencies identifies patterns that also help track human traffickers and buyers.

### ***Why is Human Trafficking so Prevalent in the North Bay Area?***

“San Francisco’s sex industry has a long established history. San Francisco has been the site of longstanding trafficking of Asian women into Chinatown for sexual

exploitation and domestic labor, going back to the mid-1800s...today the city's sex industry is part of the reputation of this liberal city. Street prostitution, strip clubs pornography emporiums, massage parlors, and escort services are mainstays of the city's attractions" (Raymond et al. 38). Human trafficking brings in big money for the pimps and traffickers who run large enterprises. There is no denying that the Bay Area has a very large population of wealthy individuals, and where there are wealthy men, one is bound to find young trafficking victims and their pimps. However, Detective Smith warns that the popularity of human trafficking within San Francisco and its neighboring larger cities has now flowed over into other, less metropolitan areas, such as Sonoma and Marin Counties, just north of San Francisco across the Golden Gate Bridge.

The entrance of human trafficking victims and pimps into these wealthy sleepy suburbs has left the public unaware of the dark and evil perpetrators who hunt for naïve, less street-smart girls to exploit. According to Detective Smith, the North Bay, particularly San Rafael and Santa Rosa, have exploded with new cases of trafficking victims, as the traffickers see these areas as a great place to make money and an area where the belief is that law enforcement is less adept and uninterested in identifying human trafficking victims. Pimps from cities such as Oakland, San Francisco, Vallejo and Sacramento bring girls to the North Bay because of the demand and the higher rates that girls can get, says Detective Smith. These same men also frequent North Bay Area bars, nightclubs and restaurants that local girls attend in order to recruit new victims for their business.

Within San Rafael, in a low-income, primarily Spanish-speaking area called the Canal district, human trafficking is a common occurrence, and one that very few residents of San Rafael are aware of, says Detective Smith. The Canal has a large population of migratory and often seasonal workers who have cash on hand, a fact that many traffickers are responsive to. This availability of cash, paired with a large male population, has enticed traffickers to set up apartments in the Canal where young girls are funneled and rotated through so as not to bore the customers with the same girls at each visit, keeping the inventory fresh and new. “Women are rotated every two weeks from brothel to brothel, so they can’t make connections and so they never know where they are...women are brought for the male migrant workers and moved from campsite to campsite” (Raymond et al. 55).

The traffickers go where there is money to be made, whether it is in major metropolitan cities or rural, country areas, and within Santa Rosa, the majority of the money is on Santa Rosa Avenue. Santa Rosa Avenue is a long corridor that bisects Santa Rosa and runs from the north end of the city to the southernmost part, ending in neighboring Rohnert Park. “The Avenue,” as it is called, is full of seedy motels and rent-by-the-hour businesses that greatly facilitate human trafficking and promote prostitution. It is the Avenue that attracts outside pimps and their victims, as law enforcement had, up until recently, been fairly lax and rather unaware of the goings-on. Young girls are promoted via the Internet, on escort sites, with their image, motel location and/or “donation” price. They are also seen walking the streets alone in fairly provocative clothing at all hours of the night and day. While these girls may appear to

be working for themselves and of their own free will, Detective Smith says that approximately 80%-90% of them are working under human traffickers and pimps who take and control their money, along with their minds and autonomy.

A prime example of the prevalence of human trafficking in Santa Rosa and the surrounding cities is evident in a recent media release given to me by Detective Smith, stating that, "On Friday, April 4, three operations were carried out in Sonoma County in response to an increase in the solicitation for and the purchase of commercial sex. The information, which led to the operations, was based on the increase of advertisements on prostitution related Internet sites. These advertisements solicited commercial sex services in Sonoma County, with many advertisements specifically mentioning that they were in the area of the Graton Casino in Rohnert Park." Prior to this media release, in our initial conversation, Detective Smith had informed me that the Santa Rosa Police Department and other local agencies had been noticing a significant increase in the number of human trafficking cases and victims that they were identifying on and around Santa Rosa Avenue since the opening of the new Graton Casino in Rohnert Park. Coincidentally, or perhaps not so coincidentally, the Avenue dead-ends almost exactly where the Graton Casino off and on-ramp is. The accessibility to young girls, coupled with the increase in patrons of the casino, brought in a whole new populace of customers for traffickers who saw the opening of the casino as an opportunity to capitalize.

As Detective Smith points out, another reason that human trafficking is so widespread and common within the Bay Area, and the rest of the country for that

matter, is the “glorification of the word pimp” and everything that comes along with that title. Music, especially Bay Area rap, promotes the idea that a real man has not reached his highest potential until he has “bitches and hoes” working under him. In addition, it portrays a glamorous and rich life for the lucky few women working as “hoes” for their pimp. The images that music videos foster are gorgeous, diamond-draped, Manolo Blahnik and Chanel-wearing, sexually provocative—yet always in control—women who are choosing who they want to be their “daddy” or pimp. These videos give the false sense that the men are the ones seeking the attention and acceptance of the women, hoping that they will be chosen to represent these beautiful women. However, this is not the case, and in actuality it is the complete opposite, as women are the ones seeking the affection and attention of the pimps, and, in turn, the pimps exploit their weaknesses, preying on their insecurities and lack of self-worth. Personally, and shamefully, I can recall dozens and dozens of songs that my friends and I used to listen to which spoke of women in the most derogatory and disrespectful ways, yet we knew every word, and sang along proudly. Detective Smith explained in more detail the clear “glorification of the word pimp” when he cited the 2006 Academy Award winner for best original song titled, “*Its Hard Out Here for a Pimp*” from the film *Hustle and Flow*, a movie based on the story of a broke pimp using his three “hoes” to pay his bills as he attempts to land a record deal with a local label. The song was performed at the Academy Awards by artist *Ludacris*, who was accompanied on stage by young women shaking and gyrating in barely-there clothing. The image and message that the song and the performance promoted, says Detective Smith, normalized and idealized

pimps and hoes, making it more of a pop-culture phenomenon than a true social issue that harms hundred of thousands of girls and women in the United States, not to mention internationally.

### ***Lisa's Story***

It was this social acceptability and de-stigmatized idea of “pimps and hoes” that aided in the conquering of Lisa’s mind and body, along with many other familial and emotional factors. This is her story.

Lisa was born in Northern California in a small town called Weed, just north of Mount Shasta. Her dad died before she turned one, and in the wake of her father’s death, her mother took her and her older brother to live with family in Sonoma County. I met her when we were 11 years old, and I remember her mother’s lack of emotional support and availability. Lisa would spend weeks at with me at my mom’s house before her own mother would call to see if we knew where Lisa was. Perhaps it was her mother’s many boyfriends who kept her too busy to figure out or care where her daughter was, or maybe it was that she knew that Lisa was a self-sufficient and responsible little girl, but whatever the reason, Lisa’s mom cannot be described as anything other than negligent and uninvolved. However, despite her lack of parenting, Lisa grew into a bright and intelligent young woman, and by the age of 17, she had a full-time job and was completing high school via home schooling so she could save money for college. She was headed for Washington to live with her maternal grandmother at the end of the summer and was preparing for the next phase of her life.

She moved in with her grandmother after graduating with honors from high school and began taking classes at a local college in Washington. In June of 2003, she came to visit me for my birthday and, as previously stated, she met Alan. "Our connection was magnetic," she says. "I felt drawn to him and felt that he was drawn to me equally. We began communicating regularly after I returned to school, and he would surprise me with visits to Washington or a plane ticket for me to come and visit him in California. I thought he was so romantic and felt like I was the only thing in his world. As our courtship intensified, he began suggesting that I move back to California to be with him. He made me feel something that I had never felt from a man before. It was intense."

Lisa and Alan's courtship was incredibly fast, with her inevitably moving to California within a few months of knowing him. Kennedy et al, support Lisa's experience, stating that by "playing on their vulnerabilities, stereotypes, and insecurities, pimps can distort a young woman's sense of right and wrong with alarming speed" (7). When I asked Lisa why she thinks that she was a good target for Alan, she responded with incredible self-awareness by stating, "At the time I was unhappy and feeling alone living in rural Washington, I had no real friends there and felt isolated. Overall, I felt lost and was lacking any strong motivation to go in any one direction in life. I had a very passive personality and had a lack of strong ties or bonds to my family. I never felt loved by my mom, and my dad was dead, so I had no male role model except my brother who didn't care about me, my childhood was less than stable, and my mom always had boyfriends that would stay with us, use her for a while, and then leave. I was never in a

relationship growing up and had no true sense of what love looked or felt like. I was the perfect mark.”

When and how a girl enters “the life” is completely dependent upon the pimp. He assesses the level of control that he has, and from that, determines when the girl will begin having sex in exchange for money. The amount of time can take anywhere from one week to six months (Rand 142). Corresponding with this research, in Lisa’s case, it was only a matter of weeks after she moved in with Alan that he began introducing the idea of escorting as a way for them to make quick money and get on with their lives together. He had her pose for provocative pictures and began posting them online. “He was very charming and incredibly verbally manipulative. He would make me feel like if I escorted that I would be ahead of all the ‘sheep’ attending college and working, hoping to be successful one day. He told me that we could do what they all wanted to do in a fraction of the time and that we were the smart ones. He had lots of money and would lavish me with gifts and dinners at expensive restaurants. The act of escorting was downplayed, and he would tell me things like, ‘Your friends fuck but just don’t get paid, be smarter than them, you can do it and make thousands, you would be stupid not to take this opportunity to make money for us, its only temporary.’ I felt like I had found the perfect man except for this one little escorting issue. He would paint a beautiful picture of our life together after escorting and focused on that, not the fact that I would be having sex with strangers for money. He downplayed it and made it all sound so simple. The first time it happened, he just dropped me off at a hotel in Burlingame and said, ‘alright, call me later.’ I remember feeling confused and numb.”

While many girls who are trafficked work the streets or are in brothels, Lisa worked in the high-end online world of escorting. She worked out of the Bay Area providing both in-call and out-call services. “Out-call services are where the individual goes to the ‘john’ and ‘in-call’ services are where the ‘john’ comes to the individual’s location” (Escort). Lisa did both. When asked to describe a day in her shoes, she explained, “I would wake up around 9 or 10 in the morning, go to the gym because he made me work-out every day or else I got my ass beat, and then come home and shower to get ready for my day. I would receive phone calls all day responding to the ads he had me post online, and I would either go see the guys at their hotel or I would go and check in at hotels all over they Bay Area, and they would come to me. Oftentimes I was required to go to their homes. I always felt shameful of myself and disgusted, but it was especially bad trying to check into hotel rooms early and not seem suspicious, then leave an hour later. I knew that the employees knew what I was doing and felt sick each time I would have to do it. Sometimes the dates would only be about sex, sometimes not at all, they involved dinner, shopping, wine tasting, a date to a business executive’s dinner. It varied, but the majority of it was about sex.”

Abuse was a major factor in Lisa’s life and occurred regularly at the hands of Alan. If she did not meet her required quota of \$1,500-\$2,000 per day, there were physical repercussions. Quotas are common within the world of human trafficking, with pimps demanding that their girls bring in a minimum amount of revenue daily, and if these quotas are not met, punishments result (Rand 142). Alan’s abuse was completely unpredictable and he would become enraged at the most trivial things. “I was in severe

shock the first time it happened. I never understood why he would become enraged over such small issues. I couldn't understand how he would become violent in some situations but not others. It was so difficult for me to accept that I was one of 'those women' that allowed herself to be treated that way. I didn't understand why my reaction was to rationalize his abuse by telling myself to not do the things that upset him. I thought that if I could remember what *not* to do wrong, that it wouldn't happen again, but there was always a reason for him to be abusive and it never stopped. He would ask me, 'Why are you making me do this to you? You know it kills me to have to treat you this way, but you just don't learn, do you?!' There were so many incidents that it is impossible to remember them all. He would backhand me across the face, push me down stairs, pull my hair, throw me against the wall, choke me, hit me with whatever he had in his hand at the time, show me where he kept his loaded guns (which was under the bed). One time, I was driving and he slapped me across the face, but this time his fingernail got stuck in my eyelid and it ripped my cornea. I pulled the car over because I couldn't see, and he kept beating me in the head because I didn't keep driving like he told me to. He told me I was fine and to stop being dramatic, but I literally couldn't see! He made me drive home with my eye bleeding, and once we got there he took the car and left for a couple days. I couldn't go to the hospital and I wasn't about to call the cops, so I had to just wait for him to get back. When he finally came home, he saw how bad it was and took me to the hospital, where they told me that I was going to be partially blind in my right eye. I had to concoct a story that the cat scratched me, but they all knew what had really happened, I just couldn't tell them because I knew he

would probably kill me if I did. Another time he took a hot clothes iron and made me put my face on the ironing board, he then put the iron on my face and told me to figure out why I was being punished. I still don't know what I did to deserve that one."

Lisa experiences are so similar to the majority of trafficked girls in regards to how violence played a role in her life as a victim of human trafficking. Raymond et al. found that women reported broken bones, including "major bones, such as ribs and vertebrae, and smaller bones such as finger and toes being broken...women are repeatedly struck in the face and head, resulting in face, head and mouth injuries...many report head injuries including nose bleeds, those that resulted in loss of consciousness or required stitches, and TMJ, (grinding and tension of the lower jaw)" (78). Unfortunately, Lisa still and likely always will have TMJ from being struck in the head repeatedly during her time with Alan.

Alan not only used physical violence and abuse to manipulate and control Lisa, but psychological as well, a tactic very common with traffickers and pimps. Lisa explained how he would keep her on a perpetual emotional rollercoaster, keeping her always on alert. "I became so accustomed to the highs and lows that it felt abnormal to not have dysfunction. I felt like he didn't care if he wasn't paying me any attention, good or bad, and it would make me want to please him more and do what he asked of me. We would spend a lot of time together doing 'boyfriend-girlfriend' stuff, and I would think that we would be doing great, but then he would disappear for days and I wouldn't be able to get a hold of him, he would do shit like that all the time. If there wasn't volatility, then I felt weird. One Christmas he bought me a diamond ring as a 'promise ring,' which I now

know was just another way to manipulate me into believing his lies of a real future together. It was all about control for him. Every move was calculated and purposeful. He always kept me on my toes and was crazy controlling. He would do stuff like ask where I was and then show up unexpectedly just to show me that he could be anywhere and that I better always be honest with him. Or he would lie about where he was to try to catch me in a lie. He would say that his friends just saw me in a certain city when I would be at home, or that he just saw me in a car with some other pimp. He would ask me questions in a way that made it impossible to keep my answers straight. I was always defending myself and trying to prove my loyalty to him and that I was faithful. He would get really angry with me for little things like what clothes I was wearing, how I was wearing my make-up. I could never be too blonde, too tan, or too skinny for him. He would monitor the amount of food that I was allowed to have in the house and take food away if he thought I was getting too fat. He said that 'tricks' (my clients), were paying money for a Barbie, not a fat, ugly little blonde girl. I was only 110 pounds, but he still thought I needed work. One thing that was especially bad was if I looked at another guy when I was with him. All of his friends were pimps and drug-dealers, and I had specific instructions to not look any of them in the eye or even speak to them, even if they spoke to me. He said that if I did, I was choosing to be with them and it was the ultimate disrespect to him. If I looked at anyone, I was in trouble because that meant I was intentionally disrespecting and trying to make him look stupid, and he would have none of that. He had the ability to shift from a gentle, kind man, into a violent rage in a

matter of seconds, and I never knew when it would happen or what would set him off. He was the most threatening and intimidating man I have ever known.”

The psychological barbs that these traffickers, like Alan, hook into these girls are so deep that many women still feel attached and bonded to the same men who are exploiting them. As seen with Lisa, many women demonstrate a “form of traumatic bonding similar to that seen in battered women...” It is the development of “...strong emotional ties between two persons, with one person intermittently harassing, beating, threatening, abusing, or intimidating the other” (Kennedy et al. 8).

Lisa is the prototypical trafficking victim, whether on the streets or online. She repeatedly explained frustration with not being able to let go of the dream life that Alan proposed for the two of them after she finished escorting. “Prostituted women reported having trouble giving up the fantasy of a perfect life that the pimps promised them and thinking that the time on the streets was only a detour before their real future together would begin...these same women often justified the beatings they regularly receive from their pimps in much the same way as battered women; they reported feeling that they must have deserved the beating. Parallels exist among the reactions of prostituted women and the descriptions of battered women who have been shown to deny or emotionally numb themselves to the level of violence that they are experiencing” (Kennedy et al. 8).

Many human trafficking victims either previously have been or become drug-addicted after entering the life in order to cope with the emotional hardships of living as a trafficking victim. However, Lisa was different in this case; she didn’t need narcotics to

keep her addicted—Alan was her drug. In fact, he didn't allow her to use any type of drugs, and her alcohol consumption was strictly monitored. While some traffickers use drugs as a form of control, others, like Alan, strictly forbid drug use of any kind because, "good-looking women can be worked for longer hours on higher scale strolls where they can bring in more cash per client... pimps could make a million dollars off a drug-free, high-end girl before she became useless, a physical and emotional ghost of her previous self" (Kennedy et al. 9). Over the six years that Lisa worked for Alan, she kept a general tally of how much money she was making for "their future together." According to her calculations, Lisa generated over three million dollars in cash for him, just off of her "dates" with men. In addition to that, there were hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of gifts, jewelry, and high-end merchandise that Alan made her return for cash, that he then kept for himself. The amount of money that traffickers can make is astounding, and usually they have multiple girls working simultaneously, as to further increase their profit, says Detective Smith.

As years went by, Lisa became disillusioned by the life that she was leading and she tried to leave Alan. Each time, I was there to help her pack her things and get her out, but unfortunately, each time, for the reasons listed above, she would go back to him. His control was so deeply embedded in her and so far-reaching that she couldn't escape him. Sometimes, when she left, it was because he had beaten her so badly that she couldn't walk, and another time it was because she was just so tired and ashamed of everything and what he asked of her. At one point, she had wanted to go to school, but the only way he would allow her to was if she would also recruit girls from the college to

work for him. Lisa attempted to attend classes for a while, but when she wasn't producing any new girls for Alan, and he began pressuring her to produce results, she quit. She couldn't bear the thought of purposely baiting girls into a life that she hated and would not inflict that kind of pain on anyone else. She was conflicted in so many ways. Her sense of morality and knowing right from wrong was intact, yet she couldn't escape his control until she finally had enough.

Lisa is unique in the sense that she was able to leave Alan for the final time when he finally tired of dealing with her constantly leaving and then coming back. He had three or four other new girls that he was concentrating on, and it seems that he finally got tired of trying to convince her to stay. Financially, he was set and really had no need for a girl who wasn't willing to work for him as hard as the others were. The last time she left, he didn't follow. That being said, while he did not physically follow her, he still kept his emotional hold on her by communicating with her daily and trying to court her as he had done at the beginning of their relationship. Lisa had moved back to Sonoma County and was trying to take back control of her life. She found a roommate, got a job, and began rebuilding; however, she was still in contact with Alan and would see him occasionally for dinner or to go on a date. He was trying to win her back, but this time something was different for her, and she was not taking the bait as she had previously. Perhaps it was the fact that now, older and more aware of her dismal future with Alan if she went back, along with the life experiences that she had, she was more mature and more aware of his manipulation and techniques; but whatever the reason, she wasn't going back to him. This infuriated Alan, as he had always been able to control her and

eventually get her back, and his subsequent explosion of rage showed just how serious he was.

Lisa was home alone one night when she heard someone at the door trying to get in. When she looked out the peephole, she saw Alan standing on the front porch attempting to get the door unlocked. She immediately called the police, something she had never done in her six years with Alan, and they responded straightaway. When the officer arrived, Alan was still there and approached the police officer explaining that his girlfriend and he had just had an argument, and he was trying to apologize to her for the way that he had acted. He was so convincing that the officer, who also talked to Lisa, believed Alan's sob story and subsequently told Lisa that she should forgive him for whatever he had said because he was clearly remorseful for behaving poorly. Lisa told the officer that she wanted Alan to leave, and the officer reluctantly escorted Alan to his car and watched him drive away. The officer then told Lisa that she had "a keeper" and should forgive her boyfriend because he was a nice guy and everyone makes mistakes. Lisa was astonished. She was not going to tell the officer the dynamic of her and Alan's relationship because she was afraid that she might get in trouble, plus she was ashamed of her previous life and was trying to leave that all behind, but the officer's opinion of Alan cemented how incredibly manipulative and believable Alan could be. Thinking that Alan had left, she settled in for the night and tried to push through the fear that he may return. What she didn't know was that her night of terror was just beginning and her fear was completely warranted and justified. A few hours later, when Lisa was in bed, Alan came bursting through the side door and into the hallway. He entered Lisa's room

and pulled her from bed by her hair, slamming her into every wall and corner that he could, screaming profanities and calling her every derogatory name in the book. "I was horrified. He pulled me out of bed and was screaming at me that I would never call the fucking cops on him again and how dare I think that I could just leave him like that. He took my phone and smashed it against the wall so I couldn't call for help and then chased me into the bathroom where I tried to close the door. Before I could get the door shut all the way, he forced his way into the bathroom and began pounding my head into the toilet seat and sink. He would grab the back of my head, slam it down onto the porcelain or into the corner of the sink, and then ask me why I made him do this to me. He kept telling me that he was going to kill me and that I would never have the chance to leave him again. He threw me down onto the bathroom floor, and I slammed into the bathtub. I felt a snap and then the most intense pain I have ever experienced and realized that something was severely broken. I kept trying to get up, but he wouldn't let me, he just kept punching and hitting me as hard as he could. When I couldn't get up anymore, he started kicking me in the stomach and in the head, all the while screaming at me that he was going to kill me and making me apologize for treating him so badly. I pleaded with him to stop but nothing stopped him. I had never seen him so enraged. I honestly thought I was going to die that night in the bathroom and my roommate was going to find my body the next day. Finally, when I was no longer moving or fighting back, he stopped and calmly told me to take off my clothes and get in the shower. He wanted me to wash off any evidence that he may have left on me, but I couldn't move, I was in so much pain that I was unable to get up off the bathroom floor.

When I didn't promptly respond to his demand, he ripped me off the ground, and I heard another crack come from my body. Something else had broke. He made me wash my hair and my body and then took my clothes and put them in a bag that he took with him. After I was clean enough for him, he left me naked in the shower. Eventually I managed to get out of the bathroom and, fighting the most intense pain of my life, was able to dress myself and find an old phone that still had a few pre-paid minutes on it. Horrified to call the police again, I called my friend and had her come pick me up. When she saw me she immediately took me to the hospital where the doctors told me that I had a broken clavicle, broken ribs, and multiple contusions and lacerations on my head and face. Then they asked me what happened; I couldn't lie anymore. I told them what Alan had done, and they called the police, who subsequently interviewed me. I told them the dynamic of our relationship, including that he had been my pimp and they took the report, assuring me that they would find him and charge him with the highest degree of offense that they possibly could."

Unfortunately for Lisa, this was not the case, and the police officers did not make good on their promise. They did find him and initially charged him with multiple felonies, but the end result of his actual conviction would turn out to be much different due to a variety of factors. Just six short years ago in 2008, Santa Rosa did not have the awareness and knowledge regarding human trafficking that it does now. Detective Smith explained that at the time of Lisa's attack, the Sonoma County District Attorney's Office was unwilling to accept, acknowledge, and go public with the fact that human trafficking was a thriving enterprise; therefore they would not try the case as such.

Instead, they decided to exclude all information regarding the trafficker/victim relationship between Alan and Lisa, and focused solely on their relationship as one in which domestic violence was the key issue. Due to the re-classification of the case from human trafficking to domestic violence, Alan's expensive defense attorney was able to get Alan off by stating that the fight that they had was simply "mutual combat," and that Lisa was equally as abusive and violent as Alan was, therefore just as responsible for the outcome. In the end, justice was not served and Alan was released from county jail after serving less than a year. He was charged with a misdemeanor and is now free to continue preying on young, vulnerable women like Lisa.

### ***Legislation to Prevent Human Trafficking***

While the outcome of Lisa's case was what Allison Cross refers to as the "dual victimization of human trafficking survivors," all is not lost. The United States, particularly California, is making headway in the battle against human trafficking, and as with any political or controversial topic, there are two sides to the argument. As with the debate regarding the legalization of marijuana in California, some individuals have a similar view on prostitution and the legalization of it. Proponents of this pro-prostitution stance argue that if it were legal and therefore taxed appropriately, the criminality would be taken out of it, and the girls would be safe. However, this is *not* the case, according to Detective Smith and many other advocates for human trafficking victims. Detective Smith asserts that the legalization of prostitution would in no way aid against the victimization and exploitation of women in the commercial sex industry. He

explained that with the exchange of money comes a mentality of ownership, and, in turn, the right to do whatever one wishes. Regardless of whether or not the girl wants to perform a desired sexual act, the idea that a fee was paid and a service—any service—is expected, is still an exploitation of that woman if she does not want to engage in it. If a woman protests, as Detective Smith has seen in many human trafficking cases, the women are almost always assaulted, either sexually or physically, oftentimes both by their customer and then subsequently by their pimp for not abiding by the rules. In addition, if a woman were to complain about the treatment from a customer and report an assault, she would most likely be unable to find more work due to her reputation of being non-compliant or a “snitch.”

There has been little to any research done to illustrate that the legalization of prostitution would decrease the violence and exploitation of children and young women (Hodge 149). “Rather, the converse seems to be more accurate—legalization seems to increase the prevalence of illegal and legal prostitution...illegal activities are shielded behind legal activities” (Hodge 149). For example, Hodge cites that nations such as “the Netherlands, which have legalized prostitution, appear to have become a magnet for traffickers and have witnessed significant increases in child prostitution...similarly in the United States, research suggests that the presence of large adult prostitution markets foster high levels of child exploitation” (149).

Recently, there has been a shift and acknowledgement that human trafficking is a growing epidemic, and legislation is beginning to mirror that acknowledgement. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, reauthorized in 2008, creates support

programs for victims and creates task forces to help combat human trafficking (Cross 403). Detective Smith created one such force when he saw the need for one within Santa Rosa, and is now connecting various organizations that offer aid to women and girls, with the law enforcement personnel that come into contact with these trafficking victims.

According to the FBI, the TVPA created the first “comprehensive federal law to address trafficking, with a significant focus on the international dimension of the problem.” In 2003 “the FBI, in conjunction with the Department of Justice Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, launched the Innocence Lost Initiative...” this initiative “...addresses the growing problem of domestic sex trafficking of children in the United States...” and to date has successfully rescued 900 children, convicted over 500 pimps or madams and their associates who help aid in the exploitation of young girls and women (Human).

Domestically changes have been occurring as well. In 2012, California voters passed Proposition 35, the Californians Against Sexual Exploitation Act, which combats human trafficking in our state. The CASE Act increases prison terms for human traffickers, requires convicted sex traffickers to register as sex offenders, requires criminal fines from convicted human traffickers to pay for services to help victims, mandates law enforcement training on human trafficking, and requires all registered sex offenders to disclose their internet accounts (What). This act also brought about awareness to Californians who previously had been unaware that trafficking is a thriving, illegal industry occurring right here in our back yards.

### ***Who is Helping?***

Within Sonoma County there are many agencies and non-profits that are helping human trafficking victims find their voice and get help. One such agency that I volunteered for is particularly helpful in the battle against human trafficking within Sonoma County. Crossing the Jordan, a faith based non-profit, is located on the south end of Santa Rosa Avenue and occupies a thrift store that many girls working “The Ave” frequent. The store is staffed with former trafficking victims and volunteers alike, who know how to spot the signs of victims and who offer an open ear and loving heart to girls who shop at the store. Through the funds earned at the thrift shop, as well as generous donations from community members, Crossing the Jordan now has two homes which house former victims of abuse and trafficking, helping the girls gain their own independence and acquire stable jobs within the community upon graduation from the CTJ program. Detective Smith works along side with CTJ as well as with other Bay Area agencies that offer support and assistance to trafficking victims. Organizations such as Verity of Santa Rosa, Children of the Night, the California Polaris Project, the Bay Area Anti-Trafficking Coalition, Youth for Tomorrow, and the SAGE Project are just a few organizations that Detective Smith has sought out for victim assistance and information. All of these organizations share the common goal of prosecuting traffickers and helping victims, and each of them play a huge role in helping bring awareness to the issue of domestic human trafficking.

### ***What You Can Do to Help***

While information is the crucial first step in tackling a problem as massive as human trafficking, it is also equally as important to know what to actually do with that information and how one can help. Almost all of the organizations listed above, as well as many other local and national organizations and non-profits, are always looking for volunteers for a variety of projects. Becoming involved and reaching out to young girls and women whom society has seemingly forgotten or discarded is incredibly impactful to the girls, especially because they have been so maltreated by those they have crossed paths with. The simple act of showing women that they are important and that the social stigmatization of being labeled a “prostitute” does not define the person that they are, goes an incredibly long way. During Lisa’s long recovery process, she was able to learn that her life as a human trafficking victim was not something that defined her as a person; rather it was something that happened to her. Being able to differentiate between the two is essential to healing, says Lisa.

Another way to help trafficking victims is by changing the discourse and societal perception of these women. Labeling girls as “prostitutes” or voluntary accomplices only further demeans and degrades them. Instead, we must see them for what they really are—victims—and we must treat them as such. The names and labels that these girls are referred to dehumanizes them and makes them easier to mistreat and disregard, as we have seen historically in times of slavery. The subjugation of a certain population or group of people allows the larger population to treat them as individuals not worth our compassion or love and we must not allow this same fate for our girls.

One can also take a more proactive approach and meet this battle head on by contacting the local police department and asking if there is a human trafficking task force within the area. If not, encouragement and the acknowledgement that the community knows about human trafficking may help the police form one. Grants and additional funding are allocated to departments that request them and prove that there is a need; therefore community involvement can greatly affect the outcome. There are also local hotlines which link directly to the police department that community members can call if one believes that a girl is being trafficked. Police are not able to see everything at all times, therefore if a community member suspects that there is something going on, a call to the hotline would be greatly appreciated by law enforcement.

### ***Conclusion***

While Lisa was able to get out of the human trafficking life, she will always be haunted by the physical, emotional and psychological damage that Alan left her with. Upon leaving him, she was able to obtain assistance through Verity, one of the organizations previously listed, and received therapy and trauma counseling. While this did help immensely, Lisa also has been able to compartmentalize periods of time in her life that she would rather forget, and is still working on resolving these issues, as she has a tendency to internalize and suppress her emotions. She still has, and most likely will always have an ongoing battle with this; however, this hasn't stopped her from moving forward. Always wanting to better herself, she enrolled in college approximately a year

after her final ordeal with Alan, went on to get her Bachelor's Degree, and is currently completing her Master's Degree in International Business. She will be finished in December 2014. In her free time, between working full time and attending school full time, she volunteers for Crossing the Jordan and sits, along with myself, on the Sonoma County Human Trafficking Task Force. She has spoken at various human trafficking conferences and meetings and continues to gain more and more self worth and love. The battle against human trafficking is hard won, but with community involvement and awareness, along with incredible women like Lisa who are willing to share their experiences, human trafficking is slowly becoming a topic that is acknowledged not only internationally but domestically, right here in our own back yards.

## Works Cited

- Baker, Debra A., and Elizabeth A. Grover. "Responding to Victims of Human Trafficking: Interagency Awareness, Housing Services, and Spiritual Care." *Journal of the North American Association of Christians in Social Work* 40.3 (2013): 308-21. Web. 27 Jan. 2014.
- Cross, Allison L. "Slipping through the Cracks: The Dual Victimization of Human-Trafficking Survivors." *McGeorge Law Review* 44.2 (2013): 395-422. Print.
- "Escort Services | Polaris Project | Combating Human Trafficking and Modern-day Slavery." *Escort Services | Polaris Project | Combating Human Trafficking and Modern-day Slavery*. Polaris Project, 2009. Web. 19 Mar. 2014.
- "Estimations of the Impact of Human Trafficking." *Trafficking*. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Jan. 2014.
- Hodge, David R. "Sexual Trafficking in the United States: A Domestic Problem with Transnational Dimensions." *Social work* 53.2 (2008): 143-52. Print.
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Rand, April. "It Can't Happen in My Backyard: The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Girls in the United States." *Child & Youth Services* 31.3 (2009): 138-56. Print.

Raymond, Janice G., Donna M. Hughes, and Carol J. Gomez. *Sex Trafficking of Women in the United States: International and Domestic Trends*. Kingston, RI: Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, 2001. Print.

"What Is Human Trafficking?" Human Trafficking Fact Sheet. N.p., 2012. Web. 03 Mar. 2014.

## Annotated Bibliography

Baker, Debra A., and Elizabeth A. Grover. "Responding to Victims of Human Trafficking: Interagency Awareness, Housing Services, and Spiritual Care." *Journal of the North American Association of Christians in Social Work* 40.3 (2013): 308-21. Web. 27 Jan. 2014.

This journal has information regarding services and agencies that offer help and aid to human trafficking victims. It gives general information on what human trafficking is and chronicles the lives and stories of victims and what they experienced. It also offers research and data regarding how services significantly help victims and concludes that more must be done.

Cross, Allison L. "Slipping through the Cracks: The Dual Victimization of Human-Trafficking Survivors." *McGeorge Law Review* 44.2 (2013): 395-422. Print.

This review offers information on the law enforcement end of human trafficking and how law enforcement needs to become more involved. It discusses the implementation of mandatory human trafficking classes that all law enforcement should be required to take and how to identify various identifying behaviors that traffickers and victims exhibit.

"Escort Services | Polaris Project | Combating Human Trafficking and Modern-day Slavery." *Escort Services | Polaris Project | Combating Human Trafficking and Modern-day Slavery*. Polaris Project, 2009. Web. 19 Mar. 2014.

The Polaris Project web site has a wealth of information on domestic human trafficking along with statistics. It discusses the importance of the Internet and the influx of victims since the implementation of various escorting websites. It was helpful in linking Lisa's story with the larger story of the human trafficking victim.

"Estimations of the Impact of Human Trafficking." Trafficking. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Jan. 2014.

This website was particularly helpful in offering invaluable statistics showing the enormous impact that human trafficking has on the world as well as on or nation. It also has information on legislation that has helped combat human trafficking and the prosecution of human trafficking offenders.

George, Shelly. "The Strong Arm of the Law is Weak: How the Trafficking Victims Protection Act Fails to Assist Effectively Victims of the Sex Trade." *Creighton Law Review* 45.3 (2012): 563-80. Print.

This review offers information on how the TVPA is not as effective as it needs to be and offers various ways to improve it. It has facts on human trafficking victims, the services that they receive and how not enough is being done to help. It offers statistics and general information on human trafficking victims.

Hepburn, Stephanie, and Rita Simon. "Hidden in Plain Sight: Human Trafficking in the United States." *Gender Issues* 27.1 (2010): 1-26. Print.

This article has plenty of information on domestic human trafficking and links it to immigration and the various issues surrounding it. It discusses the impact that immigration has and how it is a huge component of human trafficking within the United States. The article talks about the various types of human trafficking including child labor, bonded labor, and indentured servitude, as well as sexual slavery.

Hodge, David R. "Sexual Trafficking in the United States: A Domestic Problem with Transnational Dimensions." *Social work* 53.2 (2008): 143-52. Print.

This article touches on a variety of topics such as the role that organized crime plays in human trafficking, recruitment methods of young women, online victimization, and whether or not legalization of human trafficking would be effective in minimizing the abuse of trafficking victims.

"Human Sex Trafficking." FBI. FBI, 22 Feb. 2011. Web. 16 Jan. 2014.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation website offers multiple current statistics on human trafficking as well as the federal definition of human trafficking and great information regarding human trafficking. It also discusses the role that immigration plays and various methods of control used against victims. It touches on warning signs and legislation surrounding human trafficking.

Kennedy, M. Alexis, Carolin Klein, Jessica T.k. Bristowe, Barry S. Cooper, and John C. Yuille. "Routes of Recruitment." *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 15.2 (2007): 1-19. Print.

This journal offers a generous amount of information about all aspects of human trafficking, particularly the various methods of recruitment. It goes in depth about each method and the frequency in which they are used. It also discusses the role that violence plays in human trafficking.

Rand, April. "It Can't Happen in My Backyard: The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Girls in the United States." *Child & Youth Services* 31.3 (2009): 138-56. Print.

This article discusses the psychological control that traffickers have over their victims and how violence plays a major role. It talks about the manipulation of young girls and how traffickers use them until they are useless. It also discusses ways to end commercial sexual exploitation and various organizations that are aiding in this effort.

Raymond, Janice G., Donna M. Hughes, and Carol J. Gomez. *Sex Trafficking of Women in the United States: International and Domestic Trends*. Kingston, RI: Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, 2001. Print.

This article offers plenty of information on international human trafficking as well as domestic human trafficking. There is ample information on the various types of

human trafficking and it goes into detail of what each entails. There are also helpful statistics on human trafficking although they are slightly dated.

"What Is Human Trafficking?" Human Trafficking Fact Sheet. N.p., 2012. Web. 03 Mar. 2014.

This website has a significant amount of information as well as current statistics on human trafficking with particular emphasis put on the sexual slavery aspect. It defines and details how human trafficking relates to many different areas of society and the impact that it has on communities and victims alike.