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35 Million Untold Stories

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35 Million Untold Stories

▫ inallthings.org/35-million-untold-stories/

Carlye Tazelaar

Perhaps the reason I am a theology major is because I love to tell stories.

I am fascinated and captivated by conflicts, climaxes, and resolutions. These are all things we can relate to – we have all known conflict, and the moment of climax – when we make our decision – affects how our resolutions will turn out. As a theology major, I get to study the plots of stories in the Bible individually as well as studying the plot as a whole.

Fascination with story led to my attempt at writing a blog when I was 16 years old. It was a pretty lame one, to be sure, but I tried. Then, my love of telling the Story led me around the world, and somehow I found myself in the country of Bollywood's birth and the setting of Slum Dog Millionaire. That's where it happened.

She sat on my lap and cupped my face in her hands.

In that moment it was real and heartbreakingly true – sex trafficking was really happening to real people.

“Anne” was just four years old, sweet as could be. She did not say a word to me but her eyes did most of the talking as her caretakers explained, careful to maintain as much political correctness as they could. But the truth was right there: “Anne” had been discovered in a cupboard in a brothel in New Delhi's Red Light District. Anne was found during a rescue operation and brought to the shelter. Her mother was out servicing clients and had no one to turn to who could take care of her daughter.

Of course, her story has not ended in a happily ever after.

On Anne's 13th birthday, she is no longer protected by the shelter – not because the shelter is malicious, but because the government mandates that when Anne is 13 her mother has the right to come take her back and sell her into the industry as well.

My eyes were opened to the horrors of sex trafficking as I sat in a shelter in the Uttarakhand, India, at the age of 18 years old.

Since then, I have come face-to-face with women in the industry in several other instances, and those experiences have moved me deeply.

That day, I realized 35 million stories were not being told. With over 35 million people enslaved worldwide (in all forms of slavery, not just sex slavery), we are seeing the largest slavery epidemic in our world's history. Enough is enough.

Of course, this problem had existed long before my awareness of it. Power struggles have existed since the Garden. It's no secret our sinful nature is wired in such a way that we desire control, whether it be in our homes, our schools, or our workplaces. Humans have been attempting to dominate other humans for as long as we have existed. We have been attempting to dominate God. Perhaps this is what leads us to exploitation and dehumanization.

I am no social scientist and I do not have answers. One thing I do know: if we are not actively working towards a solution to this incredibly prominent issue, we are actually feeding the beast that grows stronger

and louder each day. It is my belief that what God hates more than hatred and intolerance is passivity. Hatred, injustice, torture, enslavement, and exploitation – these take passion, and certainly it is a passion born of the enemy, for nothing evil could come from God. Yet I think what grieves the heart of God more than any of this is when His children hear and see, but it falls on deaf ears and blind eyes.

William Wilberforce was an abolitionist in the 1700's and 1800's, passionate about freedom for those enslaved and a leader in abolitionist movements. He warned us that "you can choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know."¹

Many of us will never knowingly come face-to-face with prostitution, and admittedly, that can make it hard to be passionate.

Perhaps, though, sex trafficking is closer than we realize. Perhaps it is only a click away.

Yes, pornography directly contributes to sex trafficking^{2,3}. Sex trafficking is not just some man with a van stealing a young woman off the side of the road or in a parking garage. Many women who work in the industry are shown porn as an example of what their client wants to happen in the bedroom⁴, contributing to the violence that prostitution so often entails. More than that, many victims of sex trafficking are forced to create porn at the risk of their lives.⁵

Christian, do you know that 1 in 6 American women is a victim of either rape or attempted rape? ⁶ It is not just happening "over there" in Southeast Asia. Even outside of sex slavery, we are seeing its effects on those we know and love. This happens on our campuses, in our communities, and in our churches.

Pornography usage is a driving force behind sexual assaults⁷, but friend, pornography is something we can address and change here within our communities. Sex trafficking will most definitely appear unsolvable when we think of it as "some girl over there". However, there is much we can do by disrupting the cycle, having conversations, and advocating for real change.

I leave this story in your hands, now. The power is yours, and I cannot force you to act. But I pray you would join the hundreds of thousands of abolitionists choosing to fight. We choose not to turn a blind eye; we choose to see them and hear them, for they certainly are not silent; rather, we are deaf. Choose now to hear the call of the Kingdom. Certainly victims of slavery do not have worth because they are "our sisters and brothers" or "our sons and daughters". They have *inherent* worth as image bearers of God, apart from any relationship with us. Perhaps, though, we could stand to build a bridge towards relationship with them. Jesus seemed to suggest this was possible, even necessary.

Footnotes

1. Wilberforce, William. "Speech Before the House of Commons". House of Commons, Palace of Westminster, Westminster, London, England. April 18, 1791. [↩](#)
2. Arevalo, E. and Regnerus, M. (2011). Commercialized Sex and Human Bondage. Public Discourse. Princeton, N.J.: Witherspoon Institute. February 11; Malarek, V. (2009). Johns: Sex for Sale and the Men Who Buy It. New York: Arcade, 193–96; 202–4; Monto, M. A. (1999). Focusing on the Clients of Street Prostitutes: A Creative Approach to Reducing Violence Against Women. Paper submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice. [↩](#)
3. Arevalo, E. and Regnerus, M. (2011). Commercialized Sex and Human Bondage. Public Discourse.

Princeton, N.J.: Witherspoon Institute. February 11. [↵](#)

4. Poppy Project. (2004). *When Women are Trafficked: Quantifying the Gendered Experience of Trafficking in the UK*. London: Eaves; Globbe, E., Harrigan, M., and Ryan, J. (1990). *A Facilitator's Guide to Prostitution: A Matter of Violence against Women*. Minneapolis, Minn.: WHISPER. [↵](#)
5. Farley, M. (2007). Renting an Organ for Ten Minutes: What Tricks Tell Us about Prostitution, Pornography, and Trafficking. In D. E. Guinn and J. DiCaro (Eds.) *Pornography: Driving the Demand in International Sex Trafficking* (p. 145). Bloomington, Ind.: Xlibris. [↵](#)
6. National Institute of Justice & Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. *Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women Survey*. 1998. [↵](#)
7. Layden, M. A. (2010). Pornography and Violence: A New look at the Research. In J. Stoner and D. Hughes (Eds.) *The Social Costs of Pornography: A Collection of Papers* (pp. 57–68). Princeton, NJ: Witherspoon Institute. [↵](#)