

timbrel

WOMEN IN CONVERSATION TOGETHER WITH GOD

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Human Trafficking: Modern Slavery

- Inside:**
- **Human Trafficking—Not What I Imagined** 4–6
 - **Human Slavery—What Can I Do?** 7–9
 - **Bible Study: Roots of Violence in the Family** 10–11

THE PUBLICATION OF MENNONITE WOMEN USA

Human Trafficking

Taking on a topic like “Human Trafficking” for *timbrel* is not done lightly. It has been about one year since the delegate body of Mennonite Church USA voted unanimously to educate the constituency about this issue brought to the delegate body as a resolution presented by Mennonite Women USA executive director, Rhoda Keener.

I have come to learn that human trafficking, or modern slavery, is driven by consumer demand. There is a rising demand in the United States and in other nations for cheap labor to produce cheap goods and cheap food. There is also a growing demand for commercial sex, especially with children. These consumer demands create an industry for trafficked workers, both from citizen and illegal immigrant populations, which make the risk worth the profit for traffickers. But it is the **demand** for cheap products and commercial sex that is the key to the human trafficking crisis both nationally and internationally.

Ta My Ngan, a Vietnamese human trafficking research assistant, writes about the complexity of human trafficking, while Karen Lehman focuses on some things we can do about trafficking. The Bible study discusses the roots of family violence, pointing out ways some can exert destructive power and control over others. Heidi Martin and others provide resources for further study, including the Mennonite Church USA Bible study on the subject.

In this issue of *timbrel*, we define human trafficking according to The United Nations’ “Palermo Protocol,” which states trafficking is the “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.” As of September 2008, the Protocol has been signed by 117 countries, including the USA.




**Patricia
Burdette**

Cover: Ta My Ngan (right), human trafficking research assistant in Vietnam, interviews a Vietnamese victim of trafficking. (See story p. 4)

Photo by R. Eric Burdette

Sister Question for September–October

In preparation for the next issue of *timbrel*, which will focus on “Disabilities and the Church,” consider: **How does my church affirm those with disabilities?** Send your response to <PattyB@MennoniteWomenUSA.org>. 

contents

Human Trafficking—Not What I Imagined by <i>Ta My Ngan</i>	4
Human Slavery—What Can I Do? by <i>Karen Lehman</i>	7
Bible Study by <i>Elizabeth Soto Albrecht</i>	10
Three Windows, Three Women	12
Grapevine	15
Home, Hearth & Health by <i>Ruth Yellowhawk</i>	18
Stirrings by <i>Heidi Martin</i>	20
Response to Sister Question and Cup of Water	22
On the Road with Rhoda	23

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Ta My Ngan, Long Xuyen, An Giang, Vietnam, has worked for The Research Center for Social Sciences and Humanity of An Giang University for five years. Most recently, she has been working with a PhD candidate on a research project about trafficked women in her home province as well as in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Her hobby is playing badminton.

Ruth Yellowhawk, Rapid City, South Dakota, is co-director of Indigenous Issues Forums, a group of Native facilitators dedicated to community-building practices working in collaboration with others, including the Mennonite Central Committee. She lives in the Black Hills with her artist husband and their son. They enjoy walking in the Black Hills, motorcycling, and traditional dancing.



Human trafficking— not what I imagined

by Ta My Ngan

I have learned that human trafficking is much more complex than how it is often presented in the media. In July 2008, I was introduced to a Spanish PhD candidate, Nicolas Lainez, who was looking for a field assistant for his research about women's migration in the Mekong Delta region in Vietnam. The research site was Chau Doc located near the border of Cambodia—a small but interesting town not only because of its longtime reputation for being a religious location, but also because it is a fascinating developing town. The fieldwork was done from July 2008 to September 2009.

At first, my job was to be a translator, but soon my responsibilities switched to that of a field researcher, and my job was to collect data from targeted people, such as poor girls, sex workers, street people and poor families. The objective was to understand what was going on in reality about human trafficking. Some of the topics that we worked on were filial piety, informal credit for poor people, and family economics.

Before working on this research project, I had no idea what human trafficking really was. In most of the stories about human trafficking that I'd heard and read, usually the victim was a girl who was young, from a rural area, naive, helpless, unable to make reasoned judgments, or to be fully responsible for her decisions; traffickers deceived her with false promises of work in order to confine and exploit her in a foreign country (for more on this see Lainez's 2010 article, "Representing Sex Traffick-



ing in Southeast Asia? The Victim Staged,” in Tiantian Zheng’s forthcoming book, *Anti-trafficking, Human Rights, and Social Justice*).

It is true that there have been a large number of women and children who were deceived and sold for sexual or labor exploitation. However, after my time working on those topics in Chau Doc, I realize that trafficking sometimes is more complicated than “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of

The girl’s life changed when her mother convinced Hien to sell her virginity. The family got 10 million dong from the sale.

persons” as defined by the supplemental United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. The case study of one family which is heavily indebted and forced their daughter to turn to prostitution can be useful to understand the complexity of the reality.

Hien, 19 years old, has lots of cigarette burns on her arms and several pierces in one of her ears. Her father is the only person in her family who earns money. Her mother stopped working when she developed asthma some years ago. Now she spends most of her time drinking coffee, gossiping and gambling. Although the mother doesn’t work, she manages to maintain her hobbies with the money from her husband and children.

Her family has a long debt history. Here are the most remarkable events. In 2003, the family moved from a tenement house to their current location because the former place was demolished. To build a new house, they borrowed 10 million dong (about \$527 US) from a professional money lender with an interest rate of 20% per month. By 2005, the debt had climbed to 40 million dong (\$2106 US). When the parents could not pay the interest, the money lender and his people came to their house every day to shout at them and insult them.

The girl’s life changed when her mother convinced Hien to sell her virginity. The family got 10 million dong from the sale. Then Hien worked in cafés in several nearby provinces. During that time, she got pregnant by a lottery ticket seller, and she married him. She got divorced when her daughter was one year old. Soon after that, she got married a second time—to a cycle-rickshaw driver—with whom her mother continues to force Hien to maintain the rela-

tionship in order to get money from him. Another approved sex partner of Hien's is a rich old man who adopted her as his granddaughter when she was 13 years old.

However, Hien is not merely a girl who is "naive, helpless, and unable to raise reasoned judgments or to fully be responsible for her decisions." She has the capacity to access the freedom to do what she wants. Because of the fact that her mother is so strict with her, Hien lies to her mother a lot in order to maintain the relationship.

For instance, if she wins 40,000 dong (about \$2 US) from gambling, she will tell her mother she won 20,000 dong and give her mother 20,000 dong. On the one

hand, she pleases her mother because she fulfils her obligation to her mother—giving her mother all of the money she has. On the other hand, she can still have some money of her own. She also has tricked her parents to manage trips to Saigon and Vinh Long with her lover for a week, and then brought some money back to her mother to prove that she went to work. She didn't appear to be a professional sex worker, but in order to have money to spend and to give the mother, she slept with men who she calls "boy-friends."

Hien is a victim of her mother who sold her virginity and constantly forces her to exchange sex for money. Although those general facts make almost all of the trafficking stories sound the same, Hien's case proves that each girl has her own story to tell. There is the parents' power over her, her family economy, gambling, and debt. Yet, more than that, Hien is not a victim in all the circumstances that she's been through. She is not always deceived, or forced. She has the capacity to deal with her mother and to manage her relationships.

It is difficult for the media to portray this complexity in their reports on human trafficking, yet it is important to keep this complexity in mind as we learn about the subject. While it is true that some women from Chau Doc and An Giang province are truly trafficked—which means they are deceived, transported and exploited abroad in Cambodia, Malaysia or elsewhere—the reality in this area is much more complicated than most people would imagine. 📌



In Vietnam, human trafficking may take the form of arranged marriages that frequently result in women becoming domestic slaves rather than wives. Other survivors find themselves in prostitution instead of in the factory job they were promised. Lack of information and education perpetuate the cycle of human trafficking.

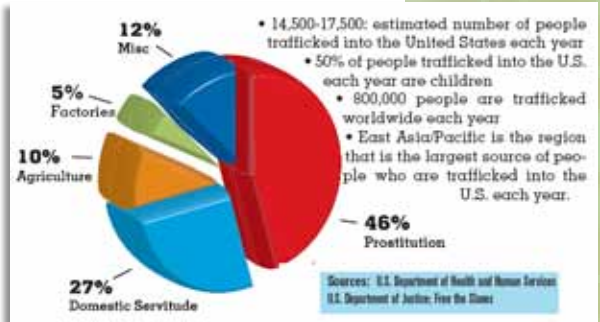
Human slavery— what can I do?

by *Karen Lehman*

Since the Delegate Assembly of Mennonite Church USA unanimously passed the Statement Against Human Trafficking, Modern Day Slavery at the 2009 Convention in Columbus, Ohio, I have been asking myself the question, “Now what?” Is it enough that we joined other united voices in opposition to human trafficking and declared that our Statement Against Human Trafficking was needed? Should we feel any additional responsibility now to collectively and visibly work to stop this modern day version of slavery? What if nothing further comes out of this initial step that the church has taken? Can we afford to sit by and do nothing?

If we agree that a statement is not enough, that there is more that we can do to stop this terrible crime against humanity, what might that look like in action? I suggest, in what follows, that there is much that we can do, personally and collectively. Starting at a grassroots level, perhaps in a neighborhood or a church group, we can begin taking responsibility and action. By educating ourselves and each other, by raising awareness, we can take measures against this shameful practice of human exploitation.

Since July 2009, when the Statement Against Human Trafficking, Modern Day Slavery was written, the statistics have increased dramatically. Human trafficking is now declared the fastest growing criminal industry in the world, rising from third to second place. The number of foreign nationals trafficked in the US continues to grow as does the number of US citizens who are victims of enslavement. Statistics on the number of children already in slavery and those at high risk to be sold or taken into slavery are shocking. What is even more alarming for me, personally, is to learn that the place where I live, just outside of Washington, DC, is the top destination for human traffickers in the country. It’s happening in my own backyard.



Sex trafficking (prostitution, pornography, and selling brides) continues to be the most profitable sector in illegal human trade. Labor trafficking, while not as lucrative as sex trafficking, is also widespread and includes domestic servitude, small to large-scale

Changing our buying habits, supporting efforts already in place, and joining forces with others in pressuring for legislative reform are concrete ways we can help.

labor operations (farms, sweatshops), and major multinational corporations.

Before I started to research the subject for this article, I believed that poverty was the major cause of human trafficking. I was wrong. While poverty and inequality are clearly factors in the vulnerability of certain populations of people to being enslaved, the real reason for trafficking is that it is highly profitable and the risk is low. As long as demand exists and the risks are minimal, trafficking of humans will continue to flourish. It is a daunting issue.

Again, I come up against the question, "What can I do?" Shockingly, the answer lies at the very heart of the problem. If human slavery is fueled by a demand for high profits, you and I are supporting trafficking by our need to be cheap, to buy the lowest cost goods we can find, and by not being aware of where our goods are made or grown. In our ignorance, our shopping habits are directly contributing to forced labor. Our Mennonite culture of thriftiness, then, actually promotes the demand for low-priced products, which in turn increases the demand for slave labor to produce those goods and products below cost.

What I can do is to start to look at my shopping practices. Where do I buy my food, my clothes, and all of the other things I need? Do I know where these items come from and if fair labor was used in the growing and distribution of the items? If I am willing to pay a fair price for the items I purchase, in order that the person making or assuring the delivery of my purchases is paid a fair wage, I can make different, more educated purchasing choices. In doing so, I can actually impact the demand for forced or enslaved labor. My shopping focus, then, changes from getting a bargain to a commitment to do my part to reduce human trafficking. As long as we demand cheap goods, large retailers will continue to force production and importation from the lowest cost manufacturers and

producers they can find, typically where forced labor is most likely to be utilized.

A quick Google search on the topic of Human Trafficking can provide information on work that is happening now to raise awareness and help victims. Websites also offer information on organizations working to stop human trafficking, lists and information on goods and products most likely made by slave or child labor, and current efforts to pass human trafficking legislation. Changing our buying habits, supporting efforts already in place, and joining forces with others in pressuring for legislative reform are concrete ways we can help.

While Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) and Ten Thousand Villages do not specifically have programs on Human Slavery, they are both leaders in working with families and those living in poverty around the world by investing in and promoting sustainable living, which ultimately gives poor people options in helping themselves. By supporting organizations such as MEDA and Ten Thousand Villages, we are helping to support fair trade and sustainable business practices.

Heightened awareness and the desire to do what I can, no matter how large or small, is what I believe we are called to do. The enslavement and victimization of humans will likely always be with us in one form or another, but sitting by and feeling helpless does not have to be our reaction. Join me in answering the question “What can I do?” by joining our collective forces in doing something. ☑



Resources

Books

- Bales, Kevin and Ron Soodalter. *The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today*. Berkley, CA: U of California P, 2009.
- Batstone, David B. *Not for Sale: The Return of the Global Slave Trade—and How We Can Fight It*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.
- Kristof, Nicholas D. and Sheryl WuDunn. *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. New York: Knopf, 2009.
- McCormick, Patricia. *Sold*. New York: Hyperion Paperbacks, 2006.
- Smith, Linda with Cindy Coloma. *Renting Lucy*. Arlington, VA: Shared Hope International P, 2009.
- Zheng, Tiantian, ed. *Anti-trafficking, Human Rights, and Social Justice*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010.

Websites

- Mennonite Church USA. “Let My People Go” Bible study. 2010.
< <http://www.mennoniteusa.org>>. (Click on Delegate Actions)

Roots of violence in the family

by Elizabeth Soto Albrecht

2 Samuel 11; 13

A pastor gently approaches a woman who has attended church with her family for a few years. He has noticed her crying on several occasions after worship. She does not participate in the women's group and is usually silent. Today she has come to church without her husband. "How is it going?" the pastor asks. The woman cannot speak, but tears fill her eyes. The pastor asks again, this time in a pastoral care manner: "If your tears had words, what would they tell me?" The woman responds in a low voice, "I am hurting . . ."

In looking at ways to help family life be healthier, we need to look at reasons families are unhealthy. Reports on domestic violence in North America inform us that one in three women will be impacted by violence during her lifetime. The state of Pennsylvania in 2005 registered 180 deaths resulting from domestic violence. If home is a safe place, why do the majority of assaults happen in the home of the victim, by the hand of a person she/he knows?

Mennonite therapist D. Pauline Zimmerman, in her book *If I Cry, Will Someone Understand Me?* writes on the importance of churches being educated on domestic violence, so that healing and hope may happen. Why does violence happen, even in Christian homes? I agree with many scholars that violence is a learned behavior. Dysfunctional families that tolerate violence produce children who abuse others as adults.

Violence is about using force—physical, verbal, sexual, or spiritual. We often confuse conflict with violence. As humans, we experience conflict with other people who strongly disagree with us, with family members who offend us in some way, with the school system for not accepting a particular policy. Conflict is normal, but when we choose to resolve the conflict using violence, there is a problem.

Our Christian obligation is to denounce injustice. But churches on many occasions have protected the offender and accused the victim. The vulnerable ones in society—women, the elderly, and children—have been victimized, those whom the Gospel calls

This Bible study is an excerpt from the Bible Study Guide by Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, Seek Peace and Pursue It: Women, Faith, and Family Care, available in June, 2010 from Mennonite Publishing Network.

Seek Peace and Pursue It is developed by Mennonite Women USA and Mennonite Women Canada.

“these little ones who believe in me” (Matt. 18:6). The individual and social temptation is to dominate the little ones and the most vulnerable. In the “kin-dom” of God we are called to speak up, to bring justice to these victims. Kin-dom living is not about abusing—taking away dignity—but giving life and returning dignity.

We can study and analyze violence to better understand it, but we cannot justify it. When we normalize violence, we keep it going. Violence is not a natural human tendency; it is a learned behavior. It can become so embedded in a person’s way of living that it can be difficult to unlearn. The clue for transformation is to understand that the roots of family violence are attitudes that perpetuate control and abuse of power, the superiority of men over women and adults over children. 📖

Prayer: *God of all creation who loves and forgives us, keep us free from all despair and fear. Amen.*

PONDER

- 1. How can women recognize when excessive control is being exerted over them?*
- 2. Share your struggles in knowing how to be helpful, while respecting boundaries, when concerned for another’s safety.*
- 3. How can we work as families of peace to make our homes and churches safer places?*

Destructive Power and Control Can Include

- Using coercion and threats (to leave, commit suicide, to hurt another)
- Using intimidation (making another afraid through looks or actions, smashing things, hurting pets)
- Using emotional abuse (putting another down, name calling, making someone feel crazy or guilty, playing mind games)
- Using isolation (controlling another’s actions or location, who the other relates with or what the other reads; using jealousy to justify isolating another)
- Minimizing, denying, blaming (making light of or denying controlling behavior, not taking another’s concerns seriously, saying the other caused the controlling behavior)
- Using children (as intermediaries, threatening to take the children, inducing guilt about the children)
- Using gender privilege (treating another like a servant, making all the decisions, being the only one to define gender roles)
- Using economic abuse (by preventing another from getting or keeping a job, taking money, withholding money or information about money)
- Physical or sexual violence

Source: Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, Minnesota.

Three Windows Three Women

Modern day slavery



*Kathy Pride, 49
Danville, Pennsylvania*

I love watching my 13-year-old daughter Tianna, who was born in Vietnam and came home to our family when she was five months old, as she negotiates the normalcy of her life—laughing with friends, tossing her head back, her pony tail swishing from side to side, texting one friend while absorbed in a conversation with another.

I watch from a distance while they talk. They are huddled together, almost nose to nose, sharing life's current challenges: the perceived unfairness of not being moved up to the "A" field hockey squad, going to watch their once preschool sandbox friends now play junior league baseball while making certain (they are 13, after all) that their mothers are either out of sight completely or maintaining a socially acceptable distance.

I catch the twinkle in her eye and the passion of her expressions. There is vibrant life inside my daughter.

But there are many her age, and from her corner of the globe, whose eyes are vacant, the passion and hope for a life that is normal robbed from them along with their innocence.

Each day children are trafficked into prostitution, forced labor, child marriage and other slavery-like conditions. I am able to watch my daughter sort out the flutters and feelings of puppy love and hopefully instill in her the value of giving herself in purity to a man who will both adore and cherish her.

And then I read about others my daughter's age, another mother's daughter being sold into the sex trade, often at an age younger than my own daughter, with a special bounty being paid for their most precious innocence.

The poverty and harsh starkness of life that those of us in our comfortable and at times too complacent life cannot truly compre-

hend have conspired against thousands of victims, one of whom could too easily have been my daughter.

It is time that the vacant and hopeless eyes of children who are precious to Jesus be precious to His bride as well. I believe that as we start viewing this issue with eyes of personal compassion the darkness can be overcome by what is now merely a faint flicker of light. 📖

*Suzanne Stauffer, 68
Stone Creek, Ohio*

I am a reader. I choose to educate myself about the world by reading as much as I can about a subject (Afghanistan, Human Trafficking, the struggles of immigrants, the struggles of those who don't "fit in" with their sexuality, teen angst literature) or the works of a particular author. Though I don't necessarily remember facts or figures, I do remember my impressions. I read (and "listen to") both fiction and non-fiction, thanks to my friend, Deb, who introduced me to the joys of nonfiction. I am not an activist except when relaying my feelings about what I've learned to someone who shows interest. Somehow I feel that this is a calling for me, that I am "missional" by educating myself and by being empathetic and understanding. Though I have strong feelings about issues, I am one of the "quiet in the land" unless you should happen to press one of my "buttons" or ask me for my opinions.

When I was working as a reference/youth librarian at our county library, I read the book, *Sold*, by Patricia McCormick, when it was first published in 2006. The book, a "quick read" written in free verse, contained subject matter that remained with me—a story about a young Nepalese girl sold by her stepfather into prostitution in Calcutta. McCormick chose her words sparingly, yet portrayed vividly the betrayal of an innocent child thrown into a life of slavery in "Happiness House." I was horrified and deeply moved.

So at MC USA last summer (2009) when Rhoda Keener introduced the Resolution Against Human Trafficking, *Sold* immediately came to mind. I recalled how powerfully this work of fiction introduced the subject of modern-day slavery. When I returned home, I decided to read similar books on the same subject. After spending many hours at the computer and contacting some other sources I had, including the editor of VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates) and some nationally-known teen librarians, I learned that few fiction



Editor's note: This column is a forum for women to share perspectives on the current timbrel theme. It introduces women spanning their 20's–30's, 40's–50's, and 60's and above. If you are interested in writing for this column, please contact editor, Patricia Burdette, at <PattyB@MenoniteWomenUSA.org>.

books have been written on the subject. Those I read were disappointing. Though there are many excellent nonfiction accounts and narratives written about human trafficking, I am convinced that a new audience of advocates fighting for the rights of children and women could be reached with well-written fiction! 📖

*Elaine Sommers Rich, 84
Bluffton, Ohio*

Theresa Flores tells her story in the Winter 2010 issue of the *University of Dayton Magazine*. At age 15 she was coerced into two years of being trafficked for sex. Finally, a waitress asked Theresa if she needed help and called the police, who saved Flores. Recovered after 23 years of healing, Flores now helps to rescue victims of sex trafficking. Sin can be very lucrative. Witness the three huge international criminal “businesses” in the order of dollars generated: selling (1) drugs, (2) human beings, (3) arms.

“Human trafficking is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world.... Unlike drugs, which, once consumed, are gone, human beings can be used and exploited over and over again, making them a valuable commodity,” explains Rachel Braver in her 2010 *Fellowship* article “Human Trafficking in Our Backyard.”

I live a pleasant life in small town Bluffton, Ohio. It includes wonderful people in my university and church communities. Yet, barely two miles away, interstate highway I-75 runs all the way from the Canadian border, via Detroit and Toledo, to Florida. Toledo (also Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) has been exposed as a center for a child prostitution ring. In 2005 only Miami, Portland, OR, and Las Vegas had more arrests for this crime according to the February 11, 2010 *Lima (Ohio) News*. We must wake up. Sex trafficking is in our backyards.

I first became aware of sex trafficking and wrote about it in a 2007 *Mennonite Weekly Review* column after reading a wake-up book, *Not for Sale*, by David Batstone. Several readers responded appreciatively. Among them was our Mennonite Women USA executive director, Rhoda Keener. How grateful I was when Rhoda introduced the resolution opposing human trafficking at the summer 2009 Mennonite Church USA Assembly in Columbus, Ohio. It passed. Now to put it into action. 📖



Your gifts help MW USA provide resources for women. MW USA is solely supported by contributions from groups and individuals. Your tax-deductible gifts can be sent to MW USA, PO Box 347, Newton, KS 67114-0347.

To contribute online, go to <giving.mennoniteusa.org/categories/4> To make a pledge online, go to <www.MennoniteWomenUSA.org/Give/Pages/default.aspx>.

Grapevine

Taking the first step

by *Mary Clemens Meyer, Editorial Advisory Council Representative, Mennonite Women USA*

What connection can human trafficking have to a 50-something white woman living in Ohio? This is what I wondered when Mennonite Women USA first focused my attention on this crime.

Earlier I had seen part of a public television documentary that interviewed young women victims of trafficking. They had boarded planes for other countries, believing they were on their way to good jobs and much-needed income. Instead, they were forced into sexual slavery and held as prisoners. One young woman's story was especially sad. She was from a desperately poor Eastern European family and needed the job to pay for cancer treatment for a younger brother. Instead, she was cut off from her family for years, beaten and abused, and given no money. By the time she escaped and returned to her family, her brother had died.

These stories shocked and saddened me, but I thought, "These things are only happening far away, right?" No, not right. The more I heard about this crime, the closer to home it I realized it was. Recently, my son Chris forwarded to me a report on human trafficking in my own state of Ohio. The headline reads: "Hundreds Forced Into Labor, Sex in Ohio." According to research by a special study commission, about 1,000 American-born children are forced into the sex trade in Ohio every year and about 800 immigrants are sexually exploited and pushed into sweatshop-type jobs. The article cites Ohio's weak laws on human trafficking, its growing demand for cheap labor, and its proximity to the Canadian border as key contributors.

Mennonite Women USA's work on this issue is timely. Trafficking is not a faraway problem; it is right here, exploiting thousands, especially women and children. Becoming aware is the first step toward ending this abuse of "the least of these." 📌



MW USA Mission and Vision

Our mission is to empower women and women's groups as we nurture our life in Christ through studying the Bible, using our gifts, hearing each other, and engaging in mission and service.

Mennonite Women USA invites women across generations, cultures, and places to share and honor our stories, care for each other, and express our prophetic voice boldly as we seek to follow Christ.

Women in Conversation



"We have all that we need around us and within us to live with gratitude."



"Living a life of gratitude and hope is counter-cultural."



To hear Megan Ramer's four keynote addresses, go to http://laurelville.org/women_in_conversation.html

Living a life of gratitude retreats



“We need to clear out space for gratitude to grow and reproduce itself.”



Women in Conversation biennial retreats are co-sponsored by Mennonite Women USA and Laurelville Mennonite Church Center. The 2010 retreats were located at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, Mt. Pleasant, Pa., and Cross Wind Retreat Center, Hesston, Kan., April 9–11 and April 30–May 2 respectively.



“How often we mistake living happily for gratitude.”



Laurelville photos by Brian Paff

Kissing a pummeled heart

by Ruth Yellowhawk



How do we kiss a pummeled heart? How do we lift the broken spirit of a young woman whose life has been cast aside and spat upon, regarded with no more interest than a torn dollar bill underfoot? Do we softly stroke her forehead? Resurrect the healing songs?

When I first saw the topic of this edition of *timbre!*—"Human Trafficking"—I panicked. This is something I'm sure I know nothing about. I thought this would require me to find someone who has been a victim firsthand. But visits to the Multi-Cultural and the Refugee Center yielded nothing.

Visits within however, offered a more complex journey. As always I began with the phrase, human trafficking. Who deigned to relegate such abhorrent practices to such a softball phrase? I ponder the well-respected essay "Politics and the English Language" by George Orwell, which posits that so much evil is wrapped in euphemisms so we can comfort ourselves in a persistent cloak of lies and misinterpretations of reality. Thus we accept killing as a human "casualty." Human trafficking as what then? People as cars, as drugs? Drugs feels closer to the truth as this practice seems to feed the most base addiction of power over another.

Where then does that leave us, those who digest publications such as this, in terms of our own sense of power? Do we fast, as one organization suggests, or watch documentary films as does another? Do we pray? Look for signs of humans at risk? None of this feels authentic to me.

I want to look at the role of men in this slave work, this soulless world economic plan. I want to look at little girls of color, healthy, vibrant and intact, running uphill to see what's there, while their parents smile at their carefree and curious natures. The number one effect of human bondage is that it rends

the family apart. The most detrimental effect of human slavery is that the family's roots are severed, the victim's identity is rendered null and void, or as the photo (right) suggests, their identity is reduced to a barcode.

Consider these staggering economic statistics from Stanford University: Some estimates place the number of children being "trafficked" at 1.2 million per year.

For now could we simply reflect on our own relationship to the issue, to power, to the plight of women everywhere? A few days ago I saw an elderly man possessively holding the elbow of a young Asian woman in a local café. Her eyes were cast down: his were empty. Later as I read the local paper I noticed the advertisements: "Untouched, young, busty, hot, Asian, first time, slender, long hair...." This goes on for three columns.

Back to words and the power lost when we either fail to use them, or replace them as if they were useless appliances. Let's just start with simple greetings: In Fiji, *Bula!* is shared at every human passing and translated to English it means simply "I see you." *Namaste* is Sanscrit for such thoughts as: "The light in me acknowledges the light in you," or "Your spirit and my spirit are One," or "That which is of God in me greets that which is of God in you." The words *Shalom* and *Aloha* carry similar intentions. Some say the Lakota greeting *Mitakuyapi* means "I greet you as a relative."

I don't share these words here as an etymologist or to simply wordsmith but as a woman grappling with how the impact of even naming a practice might be affected by our words in action. Could we evoke change by greeting one another differently, deeply, as humans travelling together, not as penned-in, powerless people subject to road rage by this issue?

This topic has left me with nothing but the hard questions I had at the start.

Let's consider the role of Mennonite men and women in answering them together. As for me, I carry on with the education of my son on this issue. 📖



Can a human being be reduced to nothing more than an object with a barcode?

Learning gives hope

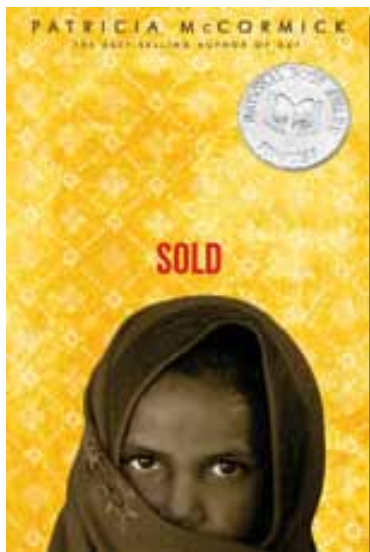
by Heidi Martin

Slavery and human trafficking is an overwhelming subject on many levels. First, it is overwhelmingly sad. The increasing numbers of those trapped in slavery are also overwhelming. There is an overwhelming amount of information on the topic, and we feel overwhelmingly helpless in knowing how to get involved.

One small way to get involved in human trafficking is to become educated on the topic. Allow me to share a few sources that I have found helpful when getting started.

Sold, written by Patricia McCormick, is a National Book Award Finalist. Though a novel, the book is based on fact as McCormick

traveled to both India and Nepal to interview women of Calcutta's red-light district and girls rescued from the brothels. Written in vignettes, the story describes the life of thirteen-year-old Lakshmi who lives in the Himalayan Mountains. She heroically agrees to take a job as a maid to support the family after a monsoon destroys their crops, but Mumtaz is not a wealthy woman in need of a cleaning service. She owns a brothel and Lakshmi must begin work immediately.



Born into Brothels offers a different perspective on human trafficking. The 2004 documentary also takes place in the red-light district of Calcutta, but this film features the children born and raised in the brothel environment.

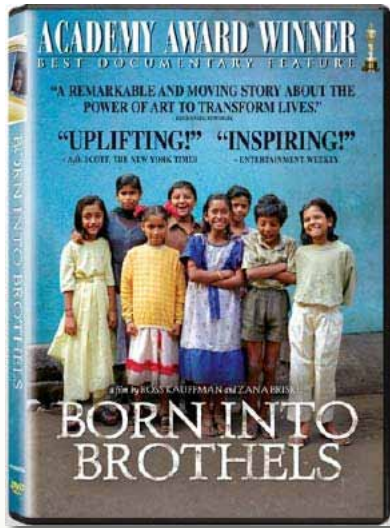
Photographer Zana Briski traveled to the red-light district of India in 1997 and quickly grew attached to the children growing up in the brothels. Wanting to see life through their eyes, Briski gave each child a camera and began teaching a weekly photography course. In time, the children opened up, describing their daily living conditions and chores as well as their dreams of education and escape.



The documentary film highlights eight children who share their stories through a series of interviews. As part of the film, Briski records the difficult journey of securing an education for these children who have few documents or medical records, not to mention the difficulty of their status as outcasts with criminal parents. The film also describes how photography literally changes their lives.

Finally, check out Sisters in Service (SIS). This organization works in the US and overseas to offer restoration and hope to abused and exploited women. They focus on topics such as child marriage, malnutrition, illiteracy, poverty and exploitation. They offer information, training and simple ways to volunteer. Go to www.sistersin-service.org to find out more.

In all these sources, there is still an overwhelming amount of sadness, but gone is the feeling of overwhelming helplessness. It is replaced by an overwhelming amount of inspiration, motivation, encouragement and, most of all, hope. 📷



Stirrings

Response to Sister Question:

Editor's note: Each issue, we print responses to our Sister Question. The question for July–August was: In what way does “modern day slavery” intersect with my life?



Emily Stednick

Emily Stednick, Fresno, California responded: Human trafficking doesn't explicitly intersect with my life. I'm not a victim of modern slavery nor do I personally know any victims of modern slavery. However, it is implicitly embedded in our daily routines and we have a choice whether to remain ignorant of our contributions to this situation or work for change.



Yvonne Diaz

Yvonne Diaz, Ligonier, Indiana responded: I have been speaking out against immigration laws such as the one recently enacted in Arizona that compound immigrant women's vulnerability. If an exploitive employer or abusive spouse controls access to documents needed to prove a woman is a legal immigrant, she would be unable to prove she is lawfully in the US, and she is at risk of being sexually exploited or abused. She would have to choose between reporting illegal behavior or risking deportation and separation from her children if she could not access her documentation.



Susan Mark Landis

Susan Mark Landis, Orville, Ohio responded: When I was a child, my heroes were the people who helped free the slaves. Now that I'm an adult, I realize that I use goods made by slaves. The global economic system is complicated. While there is no way I can escape using anything made by slaves, I also can't sit back and do nothing. Trying matters. ☑

Cup of Water

*“And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”
Matthew 10:41–42. (NRSV)*

MCC Bangladesh created an alternative job training program for former sex workers in Bangladesh in March 2008 with the encouragement of an organization that helps women who work in the sex trade.

The program, *Pobitra*, is intended to remind the women that they are not bound by the negative labels that often describe former sex workers. To become a part of the program, the women make a public commitment to stop sex work and to embrace new opportunities in the program.


To contribute to *Pobitra*, send checks to MCC Bangladesh, 21 South 12th Street, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500 or online at <<http://mcc.org>>. ☑

Human trafficking resolution— one year later

A year has passed since the Resolution Against Human Trafficking was unanimously adopted by delegates at the Columbus convention. I felt the energy of that group and the desire to add our “official” Mennonite voice to the battle against modern slavery. As important as our collective voice is, the reason which compelled me to bring this issue to the MW USA board was the need for our individual efforts.

Those who are fighting this crime are calling on faith communities, medical and social services providers, and law enforcement to learn the signs of enslavement. Identifying victims of human trafficking requires everyday people who know what the indicators are and who to call (888-3737-888) if they suspect someone is enslaved. (See <www.MennoniteWomenUSA.org/resources>). Mennonite Women USA has presented several seminars providing education on human trafficking.

At a Mennonite Health Assembly workshop I was joined by Janet Olson, Executive Director of Arizonans for the Protection of Exploited Children. (See <www.protectchild.org>). Janet brought the compelling story of her work to begin Natalie’s House, a home for eight girls, ages 11–17, rescued from sexual exploitation and abuse who need to be in a “safe house.” Janet described the need for 24-hour staffing and an on-site school at the house. She said, “If the girls go into the regular school system, they may feel unwelcome and it puts them at greater risk.” Janet’s presentation followed my listing of the signs of trafficked persons. As I listened, I was deeply moved by the enormity of the task not only of identifying survivors, but of providing communities where healing can happen.

The question facing Mennonite Church USA after this first year is how we as a denomination follow up on resolutions. **Who will continue to focus the issue of human slavery for the church, and help connect with interrelated issues of economics and immigration?** An excellent Bible study resource, “Let My People Go,” is now available from Mennonite Church USA at <www.Mennonite-USA.org/>, then click on Delegate Actions. If you wonder where to begin in responding to human trafficking, this Bible study discussion is a good place to start. 



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Janet Olson shares about Natalie’s House



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MMA Praxis works to end slavery in cocoa production

Reports of widespread forced child labor on West African cocoa farms spurred Mennonite Mutual Aid Praxis Mutual Funds and other concerned investors to engage the chocolate industry. Some children are trafficked from neighboring countries into Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana—where most of the world's cocoa is sourced—while other



children are forced to skip school and work long hours on cocoa farms. MMA Praxis is in dialogue with Hershey and other chocolate companies, encouraging them to help eliminate child labor in the complex cocoa supply

chain and encouraging them to increase pay to family farmers, seen as key to ending labor abuses. For more information go to MMA's website, <mmapraxis.com>. 

Subscription rates: One year, six issues, \$15; two years, \$28; and three years, \$39. **Group rates of 10 or more (copies sent to individual home addresses):** One year, \$13; two years, \$24; and three years, \$33. **Add \$3 for subscriptions outside the USA.** Subscribe to *timbrel* by sending the appropriate funds to MW USA, PO Box 347, Newton, KS 67114-0347. To order online: <www.mennonitewomenusa.org>.