

Choose to make a difference

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It's a choice that we each must make

In the Fall of 2005, I learned about human trafficking, which had been prevalent long before I became aware of it. Prior to then, this travesty had necessitated the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. Once made aware of this crime, I had a choice, to let this remain daunting in my mind and do nothing or to get involved somehow in this fight. First was getting informed about this issue, then came supporting others who are in the fight, then learning to help the victims as an advocate.

On any day, news of conflicts, shootings, economic climate, new gadgets, latest fashion trends, trendy eateries, and vacation destinations, far outnumber reports about children, women and men, in the U.S. and around the world, who are treated much worse than are some pets in the U.S. These men, women and children could be one of your neighbors' maid or nanny, a masseuse in a sketchy establishment, a restaurant or factory worker, a patient at a medical clinic or the hospital, an escort, a farm worker, construction laborer or someone you never see, but hear about as one of the 27 million trafficking victims around the world. Of course, not all workers in those plac-

es are trafficking victims. What makes them a trafficking victim is that they are forced to work for sex or other types of labor for little or no pay, psychologically controlled by their traffickers, have no freedom of movement, often live in sub-human conditions, and oftentimes, never make enough to pay back a loan from their traffickers.

To get an idea of the magnitude of 27 million people, I searched for the population of major cities. This figure falls somewhere between the population of New York and Tokyo, the latter being the most densely populated city in the world. If you've ever been to either city, you have a glimpse as to how many people that is. Can you imagine all those people working as modern day slaves? How is it possible that this still happens in the modern day and age of Androids and iPhones? Is it possible that we are no different from our forefathers? Trafficking victims are people, just as African slaves were people, with names, faces, hopes, dreams, and desires to be free and far from the conditions they were in. Most of them do not have money or material wealth, education or status, connections or family, and so they are more susceptible to injustices common to the disadvantaged of society.

My first encounter with a trafficking victim was in 2009. She was

trafficked as a minor from Mexico to the U.S., was promised a job at a restaurant in the U.S., only to be held by her trafficker to do all sorts of tiresome house work, sell fruit during the daytime and, in addition, be sexually abused by the trafficker's son. As I sat there listening to her account of what happened, my heart sank. No one should go through such horrific treatment by another. My heart was crying for her as I struggled to remain poised. Across from me was one among the millions who lived a reality that should not be. It was a good choice, and a good chance, to start helping one among the millions. No matter who you are and what you do for a living, you can be a part of this fight. As you become educated about this issue, you will meet people and learn about various opportunities to get involved. Along the way, you will be inspired by those already in the fight and will be transformed as you see the resilience and hope in the survivors.

Sincerely,



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Senior Editor of Culture & Policy

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