

Anticipating Child Exploitation due to Blurred Boundary Lines by Media and Society
HOLLY A. SMITH, WALKING PRAY: HOW AMERICA'S YOUTH ARE VULNERABLE TO SEX SLAVERY
(Palgrave Macmillan 2014)

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*"I was born to be a prostitute, I thought. This is no exaggeration;
I actually thought these words."¹*

Holly Austin Smith's *Walking Pray: How America's Youth Are Vulnerable to Sex Slavery* is a window into the mindset and experiences of trafficking victims in order to educate law enforcement, litigators, and parents. Sex trafficking is a subject in which has many scud preconceived notions as it pertains to its victims and how they were trafficked; in order to fully help America's youth from this very real issue, one must take the experiences and information of one victim to establish policy and assist other victims. This review examines specifically the affect society, media, and technology has had on predators and the ease that was created in their abductions. With the author's ability to reflect on the affect things such as MTV music videos and chat rooms had on her trafficking, this book serves as an outstanding guide full of first hand experiences that every law enforcement, lawyer, and advocate involved in sex trafficking should read.

¹ See HOLLY A. SMITH, WALKING PRAY: HOW AMERICA'S YOUTH ARE VULNERABLE TO SEX SLAVERY 98 (Palgrave Macmillan 2014).

Author Holly Austin Smith is a survivor of child sex trafficking and an advocate against all forms of human trafficking and child exploitation. Ms. Smith holds a bachelor's degree in Biology with an additional minor in writing from Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. Ms. Smith works with other survivors and sex trafficking organizations speaking about her personal experiences of being trafficked. When this author is not speaking to schools or other organizations, she writes articles for Huffington Post, Elite Daily, and Community Digital News. Holly Smith is also well known for her testimony submission to Congress in 2011 in collaboration with other labor trafficking survivors. She has also addressed Virginia General Assembly in support of providing awareness of human trafficking.

This book focuses on the many different aspects of human trafficking from risk factors and negative influences from society, to the buyers and even the rescue process. Within the author's chronological order of events spanning thirteen simple to read chapters, she designates one chapter to "the willing victim" and what factors influences a child to becoming trafficked. The willing victim chapter covers the definition of a "willing victim" and expands to include the influence of media through misogynistic messages and its effects on skewing personal boundaries lines in girls, causing many to accept and even expect exploitation.² This book also provides appendixes of resources for law enforcement, tips for parents, and even her personal psychiatric screenings to provide more information into the mind of a trafficking victim.

Author Holly Austin Smith sets out, in her writing, to educate law enforcement officials, legal professionals, parents, and even victims about the very misconceived world of sex trafficking. She structures her book from beginning to end about information these types of professionals and individuals should look for and consider when assisting an individual who has been sexually exploited. The book wisely begins with risk factors that put children in danger of

² See SMITH, *supra* note 1, at 43.

being trafficked such as childhood abuse or neglect, poverty, running away, mental health issues, and her list continues from there. Ms. Smith then personally reflects on her experiences of being asked how she could have let something like this happen to her, establishing the misconception in this area of legal issue, that the victim chooses this lifestyle for themselves.

The author then dives right into how the media set her up mentally to be in a place to be trafficked; she explains situations where she remembers MTV music videos that insinuated rape, and feeling torn whether to root for the man who was trying to “get with the girl” or seek help for the girl having her panties ripped off in the video, clearly against her will. Ms. Smith continues on to explain the constant pressure she felt from television, magazines, and even chat rooms to look and act a specific way, and even when that was perceived to be accomplished, there were still negativity placed on her. All these experiences that the author reflects upon, is later transferable to why she “allowed” certain experiences to happen to her.

The author continues on to reflect on being pushed to the ground at a middle school skating rink party and where a boy unzipped his pants and made clear he wanted oral sex; throughout the book, the reader is able to see into the mind and thought process of the victim and in this case, the author’s mind, and weighing between something she was unsure about and something she had seen done on television and feeling this act was expected from her by men. This memory and others establishes another section of the book where she speaks about “the buyers” or “johns” she has entertained while being trafficked. While this section of the book may cause heartache for some, it is a powerful addition in viewing a victim being broken down mentally and emotionally through the lack of humanity in these “johns” who are willing to use a fourteen-year-old girl and yet no one is willing to help.

The entire book goes back and forth between facts and statistics, the author's personal experiences, and how to address and assist someone in this situation based on this first-hand information. Although one is educated throughout about definitions, other advocates, books, and resources available to legal professionals, the author adds to the end of her book an appendix that lists the resources once again, tips for different people and age groups, as well as her personal medical intakes and discharges in order to provide readers with a more rounded sense of her mindset at the time her experience occurred.

Ms. Holly Smith set out to educate her readers about sex trafficking through facts and personal experiences. Through the constant in-depth recollection of her experiences and memories of how she felt, the author most definitely achieves her goal in educating her readers. What enhances this book is not only the inside look into this world through the eyes of a victim, but her addition of statistics and other news articles about similar stories from all over the country. Although this book would be most suited for professionals, such as social workers and victim witness advocates, this book would be beneficial for any legal professional looking to enter into this area of law and getting a full and well-rounded look at the sex trafficking world and how the different societal influences can have a role into it.

For any of my colleagues who are practicing in this field or have a desire to practice in this area of law, I would absolutely recommend this as a must read. This book was a fast and simple read yet very compelling and educational; I found myself at times becoming emotional and shaking my head at comments made as if I was experiencing these situations personally. There are always two sides to a story, and before continuing advocating for victims or embarking in the prosecution of traffickers, I recommend reading this book to get the true and genuine side

of a victim in order to truly help those who have found themselves being sexually exploited, because a prostitute is not just a prostitute and “they [are] not choosing to be on the streets.”³

³ See SMITH, *supra* note 1, at 135.