


Law enforcement training: The missing service for victims of human trafficking

Comment | Tweet | Share |  EMAIL | More |



Wednesday, September 19, 2012 - Speaking Out by Holly Smith

Holly Smith



[Ask me a question.](#)

WASHINGTON, DC, September 19, 2012 - "How old are you?"

It was the middle of the night. I was standing on Pacific Avenue in Atlantic City, New Jersey when a round and squinty-eyed policeman approached and posed this question to me.

"Eighteen," I offered.

My feet were blistered. I tried to hide this discomfort as I shifted my weight onto the other foot. My hair fell in front of my face, and I knew parts of my scalp were visible. A double dose of hair dye had burned my dirty-blond hair and colored it an ugly yellow.

"Don't lie to me," the officer leered.

Thirty-six hours earlier I was on my way to Hollywood. I was going to be a singer or songwriter, an actor, or maybe even a model. A man I had met at the mall promised these occupations to me, but what he ultimately delivered was a dress and red high heels which were two sizes too big for

WHO WE ARE

This is the Communities at WashingtonTimes.com. Individual contributors are responsible for their content, which is not edited by The Washington Times. **The opinions of Communities writers do not necessarily reflect nor are they endorsed by the Washington Times.** Contact Us with questions or comments.

Like Us   Tweet



Get The Most Up-To-Date News From The Washington Times Communities.

 * required

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer initiation ill-advisedly aboli...



TV tonight: ABC's Scandal far more real than American Idol



Delmon Young joins Michael Vick breaking bad for Philadelphi...



Tim Tebow now owns "Tebowing" trademark: Setting a new prece...

March for Life Irony: The 'disarming' and disassociating of America

Basketball Hall of Fame 2010: Induction ceremony

MOST READ

Women in combat roles: Is it possible?

Winter 2013 TV schedule: what new shows should you watch?

me.

I insisted to this officer that I was eighteen years old. I did this for a couple of reasons. First, I was instructed to do this by the man whom I'd met at the mall and by his girlfriend, who had dyed my hair hours earlier. Second, I didn't want to go back home, but neither did I want to be on that street corner. I *wanted* to be in Hollywood- auditioning for a television show or meeting my favorite rock stars or dancing in a fancy club. But, by that point, those dreams seemed stupid to me.

When the officer walked away from me, seemingly satisfied with my made-up story, I called out to him.

"What if I *was* under eighteen?" I asked.

This was a serious question. I wanted to know- *What were my options? Where could I go? Could I go somewhere other than home? Was there a place to which I might belong?*

"That's it," hollered the officer, "I've had enough of you."

He handcuffed me, shoved me into the back of the police car, and then assailed me with insults from the driver's seat. I stared out the window. I was so angry- not so much with him, but with myself for taking the chance at trusting him. *I should have known not to trust him*, I thought, *I should have known not to trust anyone*.

I was fourteen years old.

Last week I wrote an article listing [my ideas for victim services](#); however, I believe that any discussion of immediate needs for victims of sex trafficking must include the topic of law enforcement training. As this police officer insulted me with names and labels, my connection to the society I had left only thirty-six hours earlier grew more and more distant until a deep valley separated me from it. I, the *teen prostitute*, on one side; and the officer, the authority, the police of that society, sat on the other side studying me with disgust and scorn.

I won't repeat here the words that this officer used against me. My point is not to paint a picture of blame or wrongdoing; my point is to underscore the need for law enforcement training. The initial exchange between a child or teen victim and an officer sets the tone for all subsequent interactions between the minor and other law enforcement, advocates, and social service providers. Without receiving compassion or empathy from the police, a child may come to view anyone involved in his or her case with contempt and distrust, thereby compromising the child's openness towards after-care services.

I know this because I was there. I folded my arms against any help offered by all members of a society that immediately judged me without knowing my circumstances. By the time I met detectives who recognized me as a victim; I was angry, distant, and withdrawn. I flat out refused to cooperate, and the opportunity to quickly apprehend my perpetrators was lost. By the time I reluctantly agreed to work with police, the traffickers had fled. I reacted with equal reluctance and distrust towards the social workers and child psychiatrists who offered to help me.

Proper and thorough training for *all* levels of law enforcement is the best way to prevent any initial mistreatment to or misunderstanding with a child victim. I also believe this training must include the perspective of a survivor of child sex trafficking, as well as survivors of other forms of human trafficking. An officer must know that, even if a potential child or teen victim presents as uncooperative or belligerent, the officer must respond with discipline not discrimination.

The U.S. Department of Justice's AMBER Alert Initiative has pioneered a survivor-informed training program for law enforcement and other partners which offers a multi-disciplinary team approach

[U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer initiation ill-advisedly abolished](#)

[Chuck Hagel and Israel: Nothing new under the sun](#)
[How to disable Java following Homeland Security warning](#)

[Presidential emergency powers: Security versus civil liberties](#)

[March for Life Irony: The disarming and disassociating of America](#)

[TV tonight: ABCs Scandal far more real than American Idol](#)

[Facebook envy getting you down?](#)

[Obama inauguration speech: We the people means 'government'](#)

QUESTION OF THE DAY

Will President Obama be able to be effective in his 2nd term

Yes

No

[View results](#)

FEATURED NEIGHBORHOODS



The Doctrine of Politics

Let's talk about military policies and programs, past and present.

Women in combat roles: Is it possible?

Panetta dropped a hand grenade on US military culture with a unilateral decision to open combat occupational specialties to women.

Presidential emergency powers: Security versus civil liberties

President Obama's drone strike program and security policies are rooted in a long line of controversial Presidential emergency actions.

Communities Health and Science today

A collection of reader guest articles, thoughts and opinions by Communities writers, expert opinions and breaking news and information.

Morning Market Maven

Wall Street news before (and occasionally after) the opening bell.

TV Den

Television commentary, reviews, news and nonstop DVR catch-up.

What in the World

In a world that is increasingly complex, we need to seek greater awareness of the blending of cultures and America's changing role in a global community.

involving prosecutors and service providers. Their goal is to address not only the rescue of the victim but also his or her long-term wellbeing. Their focus is for law enforcement to play a major role in the rescue and stabilization of the victim with the understanding that support services must be in place. They urge prosecutors to work aggressively with law enforcement at targeting traffickers and organizations promoting or engaged in human trafficking, as well as addressing the demand side. For more information, please check the [AMBER Alert Training Calendar](#) or contact askamber@fvtc.edu.

I urge you to invite AMBER Alert, or another survivor-informed organization, to your next law enforcement training event.

Holly Austin Smith is a survivor advocate, author, and speaker. She invites you to join her on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) and to follow her personal blog.

This article is the copyrighted property of the writer and Communities @ WashingtonTimes.com. Written permission must be obtained before reprint in online or print media. REPRINTING TWTC CONTENT WITHOUT PERMISSION AND/OR PAYMENT IS THEFT AND PUNISHABLE BY LAW.

More from **Speaking Out**



The Life: TV show reveals the brutal cost of sex trafficking of women and minors



How YOU can help prevent child trafficking



The Stop Modern Slavery walk is Sept. 29th, 2012

Showing **12 comments**

Sort by newest first



Eleanor, 74 yr. oldd female, retired RN after 40 plus yrs. in Nursing. widowed in '98 after a happ...

Yes, the police, the first responders, and the public need a great education in these areas. Just as a woman who has been brutally raped, the first words are accusatory towards her. like, Why were you in that place, even tho it was in the parking lot of a respected motel. What were you wearing? Did you speak to this person first, did yu make eye contact, did you send the wrong signal? By the time they have finished interrogated you, you begin to wonder what really happened, when you know full well, that you were the victim. Then if the perp is caught and goes to trial, you have to endure all the accusations by the defense attorney with little objection by the prosecuting attorney. This is nothing new. This happened years ago, has never been forgotten, and makes me reluctant to call for help in that type of situation today. I would only call 911 for medical emergency of if my life was in danger, and I live in a small area and know most of the officers, responders who would be there. Some things destroy your faith, and it is done by a few, not the norm.

1 month ago

Like Reply



Lorraine

Great Article, Holly! I would like to see such training be made mandatory for all law enforcement. I know training is made available, but if they are not required to attend, what is the point. This is vital information that every first responder needs! Thanks for all you are doing!

4 months ago 2 Likes

Like Reply



Airbornefist7

I am disturbed by the sad fact that people would do this! Would offend a child in this way. It would be better if a millstone was tied around his neck and he is cast in the sea than whats in store for them in the day of judgement. I really wish there is more we could do

4 months ago 3 Likes

Like Reply

VIDEO



Panetta: Women Integral to Military's Success (Runtime: 02:25)

More Video

View all Videos >



01:26



01:38



02:29

'Apps for Apes,' Orangutans Use iPads

Ravens Preparing for Matchup With 49ers

Baranski on 'Good Wife' Season, Diane Lockhart

PHOTO GALLERIES



Rock of Ages at Wolf Trap, Vienna, VA

Images from the stage musical Rock of Ages at Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts

8 Photos



Antartic Dreams by Dave Bartruff

Antartic Dreams by Dave Bartruff

17 Photos



2013 Tournament of Roses Parade Highlights

37 Photos



2013 Rose Parade Float Renderings

Sneak preview renderings of 25 out of the 41 floats in the 2013 Tournament of Roses Parade.

25 Photos



Exclusive: Rev Fest Times Photos

A photo collection from the four day Rev Fest at Irving Plaza in NYC. celebrating the 25th anniversary of Revelation Records and featuring the bands Damnation A.D., Mouthpiece, Chain of Strength, Battery, Bold, Supertouch, Youth of Today, and Into Another. (Photos by Adam Tanner)



hopeheaven007

Go too your God and PRAY- Guess thats better then sitting around WISHING them too death but since we cant count on that happening, you can do more, PRAY :)))

4 months ago in reply to Airbornefist7

Like Reply

18 Photos



Sandy Hooks Elementary School
Shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

8 Photos



A Christmas Album: O' Little Town of Bethlehem...Today!
Images of Bethlehem by photographer

Dave Bartruff

20 Photos



Mariosalazar

While I am the first to admire our first responders, I have always wondered where some of them left their humanity.

Several years ago I parked my car at the edge of a parking lot due to heavy occupancy. As I was getting out I noticed that semi hidden from view was a young men that appeared to be sleeping in the grass at the edge. I did notice that the position of his body was odd. When I came closer, I realized the guy was passed out. So I called 911, and decided to wait to point out the location of the boy.

When they arrived they proceeded to roughly kick him over to see his face. Then they took their time in putting him in the ambulance. They appeared extremely angry that I had called them. One of them even remarked, "As if we didn't have enough to do, we have to take care of these GD druggies." I am not sure how they were able to determine this by just looking at him.

4 months ago 2 Likes

Like Reply



Beth Jacobs

They can't determine that by looking at anyone.

3 months ago in reply to Mariosalazar

Like Reply



hopeheaven007

A victim of human trafficking can be hooked on drugs. So I dont believe that judgements or deciding who or what the victim is until they arrive too hospital is important as much as gertting them the medical attention they need IMMEDIATELY. Once at hospital, police, detectivces, rape victim advocates, human trafficking advocates can all determine together the victim and the case. This would stop alot of sterotyping by getting the police officer, or bystander so much off of is this person a drug addict or not, too actually doing your job and getting medical attention. That should be the law and your number one prorty. The police who kicked him will remain street cops where they are needed too stop the war on drugs, not on human trafficking. Only special officers get qualified too even be part of any human trafficking unit. Eliminates alot of problems right from the beginning as too not tear us apart and remain focused on the victim and then our other job duties...

4 months ago in reply to Mariosalazar

Like Reply



Kelly

I am a police officer and I schedule continuing education training for my state agency. I have Human Trafficking classes in place to educate the street officer. I have attended this class and I could not believe how ignorant I was on this subject. I hope to schedule more classes in 2013. With budget cuts every year, it gets harder and harder to find the money to pay the experts (yes they charge) in this area to teach. Education is the key.

4 months ago 8 Likes

Like Reply



hopeheaven007

No Officer Kelly, not all agnecys ask for money too provide you with information, facts, and knowledge. They do it because it is thier cause and all they believe in, especially with it soon going too pass all drugs and weapons for these criminals. I would suggest calling Polaris Project and Im sure they can furthur assist too you. Kudos for wanting your police department PROPERLY trained.... Thats more appericiated then you will ever know...

4 months ago in reply to Kelly 1 Like

Like Reply



Lorraine

There are many non-profit anti-human trafficking groups who will provide such training for free. Holly can help you locate some near you.

4 months ago in reply to Kelly

Like Reply

POPULAR THREADS

[Women in combat roles: Is it possible?](#)

28 comments · 13 minutes ago

[U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer initiation ill-advisedly abolished](#)

380 comments · 2 hours ago

[Obama inauguration speech: 'We the people' means 'government'](#)

70 comments · 2 days ago

[Chuck Hagel and Israel: Nothing new under the sun](#)

9 comments · 11 minutes ago

[Hillary Clinton: What difference did she make?](#)

1 comment · 1 hour ago

Powered by Disqus



Roy Kathie

OMG, this sensitive serious article, which is very good, has an ad for meeting your Asian Lady right beside it. Bad taste Washington Times.

4 months ago 2 Likes

Like Reply



Manhattan Call Girl

Holly Smith is so amazingly and generously honest -- as such her words bring great comfort to other survivors. I was moved to tears as I read this. Whenever I read Holly Smith, I want to read more. She is an important writer.

4 months ago 4 Likes

Like Reply

[✉ Subscribe by email](#) [RSS](#)

Add New Comment

[Login](#)



Type your comment here.

Reactions



Trackback URL

blog comments powered by **DISQUS**