



WORKING GIRL...

**Kate Transchel, CSU Chico History Professor:** I'm very excited about our next speaker, Michelle Anderson. If you've been listening to some of things, you're going okay. So, yeah, Justin he's a musician, he's got connections, what can I do? Well, this is a local girl done good. Michelle is a CSU, Chico alum and she spent 6 months living in an after-care facility in Bangkok, Thailand with 7 young women who had come out of working in the brothels. She taught English classes 4 days a week to approximately 25 women and girls that were still working in the brothels in one of Bangkok's largest Red Light Districts. Michelle and her organization provided food, shelter, health care, friendship, access to education and counseling services, alternative methods of income, whatever they needed to help them get back on their feet and to provide their families with sustenance, if you will, without the girls having to return to the sex trade. So she has a lot of wonderful stories and we're just lucky to have her here. Michelle.

**Michelle Anderson Curran:** So, I really haven't done much but I was the one who really got a lot out of working with the young women that I got to meet and it was my privilege to become their friends. So, okay, am I loud? I'll speak right here then. So I'm going to go through this. This actually is one my absolute favorite comics. You probably can't read it from the back so I'll read it to you. Right up in the top left corner says, "It's true, Hobbes, ignorance is bliss. Once you know things, you start seeing problems everywhere and once you see problems, you feel like you ought to try to fix them and fixing problems always seems to require personal change, and change means doing things that aren't fun. I say phooey to that!"



WORKING GIRL...

But if you're willfully stupid, you don't know any better, so you can keep doing whatever you like! The secret to happiness is short-term stupid, self-interest!" "We're heading for that cliff!" "I don't want to know about it," and then they fly off the cliff. And he says, "I'm not sure I can stand so much bliss." And Calvin says, "Careful! We don't want to learn anything from this." And this I share because it's become one of my absolute favorite comics 'cause I think it was this first thing that was up in my professor's class when I got home from working in Thailand. And it struck a chord with me because I'd come home, I had a month between the day I left Thailand and the day that school started my new classes. And I, really between that time, I did not know what to do with what I've just seen. And I didn't know how I could be a part of it, what I would do with that emotionally and what--how to make sense of it. So this comic went up on the board and at that point I knew that I couldn't just be ignorant and put the blinders back on but that my life has been impacted and it was impacted forever. And what did that look like? What did I do with that next? So, I always share that and I'll share it again at the end 'cause I just like it that much. But, oh yeah, we'll see.



So I'm a local girl from Chico, born and raised, and I wound up going to Chico State which was never in my plan. But I had a fortunate experience of having my life ruined in a lot of ways and I realized that the only perspective on the world I had was suburban White America. That was what I knew. It was living here in Chico. And when I lived, I actually moved to Washington D.C. between school, my junior and senior year, or my sophomore and junior year. And I had an experience. I lived with 14 girls from all over the world and I recognized that my perspective on life was so small and that so many people have so many different stories and my life would only be enriched by getting to know them. And when I was a freshman in college, I first saw a "20/20" documentary. This is before human trafficking was really a buzz word, just kind of begun coming into consciousness for people. And so there was a "20/20" film, and it showed American doctors going into India and purchasing young girls for sex and I thought this cannot be true. And it was at that point that I started becoming aware and educating myself about it. 2 years later I lived in Washington D.C. and I wound up meeting a couple who was retired, they're in their 60s and they moved to Thailand. When they lived in Thailand and when they were there they started seeing this issue and so they bought a house. And they wound up starting to teach English and they would walk the streets and they would meet young girls and they'd invite them to come to their English classes. And that's when I met them. They had been open for about a year and they were just opening when I met them and then I went and spent 6 months with them.



And I'll show you some pictures in a second of the street that I lived on and the girls that I lived with. And they had been open a year and a half when I got there. So these photos are--it's supposed to be in the shape of an "I" but I'm not very cool at technology and. So it really, these are the people who've impacted my life and my reality and they have shaped who I am and what I do and what I'm passionate about now. And so some of these girls are girls that were in the brothels that I worked in some were from when I lived in Africa, some were from inner city D.C, some were from Chico, and they really shaped how I view the world. And so that's always something that is important.



I think when we talk about trafficking, it's so easy to become just numbers and figures and be dehumanized. And often times one of the things that I'm really sensitive to, especially when I share about what I experience, is that people start to think, "Oh, how could they do that to their women?" "How could they sell their daughters?" And Thailand is an incredible country. Incredible people, incredible stories and it's Beautiful. So I always show these pictures just to remind us that it really is a place of incredible stories and it is a Beautiful country. So these are a few photos.





It's a kingdom, there's a king that's been empowered for 80 years and they love him and they all wear yellow on Mondays in his honor, so you'll see pictures of all the girls I was working with in yellow t-shirts.



It is a Beautiful place...



...and I was given so much when I was there.





I don't want you to only think that it was absolutely despairing.



It's a city of 11 million people, which is very large.



And I just show this picture even as a reminder that within the country of Thailand not everyone knows about human trafficking or that sex tourism is a huge issue in Thailand. These young girls are from an upper middle class school that was on a field trip with us. And they are lot like the upper middle class here in the United States. We aren't necessarily connected to our poor or the people who are being exploited in our country, in our own country. We have more in common with them than we often do with our own countrymen. And so, anyway, there were some good friends that I wound up getting to know.



This is the street that I lived on. It's located in the district that's got about 200,000 Westerners that live in the city of Bangkok in this one area. It looks like you're walking down the street of any city here. There's a Starbucks and McDonald's. I mean the only difference is Ronald is bowing instead of waving. But other than that it looks just like you're in a city here, Tony Roma's subway, and you wouldn't even know that you're in a foreign place until you become aware. And when I became aware I got to--I flew in. And the only way that my dad would ever let me go as a 22-year-old was if I studied abroad and so I did as a Chico State student. I studied abroad in the university in Thailand and I took classes. I had 12 hours of class in one day, and then the rest of the days I spent in the city working with this organization. And so when I lived in the city, it was about a two-and-a-half hour commute even though it's about 25 kilometers to travel. So I took every form of public transit that you could to get here. And I would live with the girls during the week in this home. There were 7 young women and this is called Nana Plaza and in that little tiny plaza, you'll see that sign up on the board on the right hand side and in there that's just a gateway to an area that's like a cul-de-sac. And there are about 59 bars that are in there. And they start as sports bars. You can see if you look really close, there's some TVs and there're just sport they're showing soccer and football and basketball, and then there's some young women there. And each of the bars has like a front bar, and then they all go back in the deeper and farther back you go the younger the girls get and the more kinky the sex gets. And so this is the district that many of the girls I worked with that came to my English class would come out of. They would walk down and come and visit and get--we got to know each other really well. So Nana Plaza is looking one way.





And then if you turn around and look down the other way, I lived down past, probably about 6 blocks down from this spot. And between Nana Plaza, which is where that first picture is and this picture is there's 64 more bars, bars or brothels, there were places where sex is available. And I got to know them well.





This was my English class. Quan this is one of the girls who lived in the house. She was 11 when she was first trafficked. At the time I lived there she was 15 and she had been living in the house since it opened, for about a year. She was not shy at the camera and loved to smile.



You'll see they're wearing the yellow shirts in honor of the king, it was a Monday.



Teaching English was rudimentary, to say the least. I have no skills in teaching English other than I speak English. And so I showed up the first day and I said, "What can--what I do? What can I do?" And they're like, "You're going to teach English." And so I jumped in and the only way I taught English that first day was because they had a Thai dictionary, Thai-English dictionary and I have an English-Thai dictionary. And that's how we talked was through the dictionary. But these women have faced everything you can imagine or actually probably can't imagine in life. And many of them, this young or this woman on the end, her name is Bo [phonetic]. She is 44, and she had been married and lived in a very small village in the north of Thailand. She was married. Her husband left and he had a number of mistresses, which is not uncommon culturally. And he wound up leaving her to care for their 2 children, his disabled brother and his parents. And so she became very desperate. They lived in a very small village. You'll see pictures in a second of what that looks like. And she wound up coming to the city, because she felt like it was her only option. Someone said, "I'll get you a job in the city." So she did--she came to the city and started working.



And one of the men who would continually purchase her, he became very fond of her. He asked her to move in with him and she did. He's a Westerner who coerced her into helping him pay money and he--she wound up giving him about a month worth of her salary. And she came home one day and he'd told her he needed to go to the hospital. And so she would continue working in the bars and then paying him. And he wound up changing the locks on her and she was on the street and that's when the couple I worked at met her. And so she is, has been living at this home since because she needs education, she needs resources so she can help provide for her family and not have to be selling herself day to day and then being abused on top of that.



This is Quan again.





That's a view from the city from my roof top. And then we had a garden so that the girls can learn about growing. Many of them are from villages where rice is their staple, rice and also poppies were their staple. The government at Thailand outlawed the growth of poppies. And as a result many of the villages that have their income, their income was for centuries, has relied on selling poppies, which of course is used for opium and that's why the government, why the government outlawed it. They weren't given anything in return, in exchange to make their living off of and so they became extremely desolate. And Quan is from one of those villages as well.



So, many of the girls that are used for sex in the city of Bangkok are actually from other countries. They are from the villages--in the Burmese villages, the Karen people. They're from Laos and Cambodia and they all live in the villages and they've been refugees at one point in Thailand. And now they've built into--they've become settled there. And then they lost their crops, their cash crops and so they have become very desperate. So many of the girls that you actually see that are for sale for sex in the city of Bangkok are actually not necessarily Thai. They are women from all over Thailand, but they are from different indigenous nations. And then many of the Thai women are actually the ones that are trafficked out of country. So they're trafficked to Japan, they're trafficked to the United States, they're trafficked to other countries because they are in high demand. We tried to not only teach English. So there are about 25 girls that would come 4 days a week for English class, either morning class or an afternoon class. The girls would come and I'll tell you one story in particular the very first night I was there, it was my first day at English and I started getting to know a young woman. And her name is Bo, and it was her first day in the brothel, in the bars as well. She had come with a friend and she is from a village she had come in. She was 23, beautiful, and had sparkles in her eyes and we had a great time. She is very animated and we had a great conversation that day. She wound up leaving that day obviously was our first day of English. And that evening I went into the bars with the 2 women I worked with.



So the way that the house is structured is it's all run by Thai woman who want to make a difference for these young girls and give them an opportunity. And then there is an American couple that helps just with the support of the house. And they--the Thai woman who runs it and the American woman who runs it--took me with them into the bars in my first night. And we went into the first layer of bars which were like the sports bars. They are the most casual and then they took me into about 4 different bars that night. And by the time we got to the fourth bar, I kind of had stopped functioning a little bit because I was horrified by what I was seeing. And the girls who were dressed in school girl uniforms, at the outside of the bar, and then as you get in, they're hardly clothed in anything and they're very young, very young. I think that the youngest I saw was about 10 to 12. And they were, I mean, girls with like little pig tails and cute smiles. And then there's these Western men. The bars I was in, it was all Western men, they were there buying sex, European, American, Japanese. There were couples there that were purchasing sex. There was a couple with their child with them A father was at this Thai and I overheard him telling his son like tonight is the night you become a man and he handed him a lot of cash. And so I was overwhelmed to say the least. And by the time we hit the fourth bar that we went into, I, yeah, mentally, I just--I was zoning out. And who's--the Thai woman who was with me, she elbowed me and they had cut me in the middle to help protect me a little bit so that girls weren't soliciting me for sex or soliciting, thinking I was soliciting them for sex. And so she was elbowing me and I kind of wake out of my daze. And she said, "Michelle, come over here."





This young girl speaks English. And so I scooted over and began to talk to this young woman. I come to find out she is 22, she is exactly how old I was. She was a college graduate. She'd studied International Business and she was fluent in Chinese, in Thai, and English. And it was her very first night in the brothel, in the bar. And she was in her school girl uniform because she hadn't been up on the table dancing yet. And so we're talking as we're watching this, and I'm, as I'm talking to her and getting to know her, I'm realizing that we--like that is me, it's a mere image of myself, and, yeah, even more educated than I am. And yet she have the responsibility of supporting her family who is back in the village and she had gone home and 'cause she could not get a job. She had gone home and then people came to her and said, you need to find--come to the city, I will provide you a job with education, you'll have more than you have here and you'll be able to support your family. So she was forced into it, wound up being her first day and we're watching this go on and we're watching this little 15-year-old girl dancing for a 70-year-old white guy with a preacher's collar, nonetheless, on. And as we're both watching this, and I'm thinking I'm in hell. And then it hit me that like I'm in hell but I can get out and she, this is life, she is watching it. And we are watching it together and I will never forget that moment because that was a huge reality check for me. And I went home that night and felt I can't do that. I will be here and I will teach English but I cannot go back there. And I got, you know, the next morning, had my English students come in and built a relationship with Bo, and again the same young woman I'd met the day before.



And life went on like that. I had gone into the bars again later that week and then I just thought I can't do this. In the following week, I came back for my second week to teach. And the girls are like, "Michelle, where have you been?" Like we, we like it when you come to the bars," 'cause I was thinking, "Gosh, they must be embarrassed. They're having to solicit these men for sex in front of me. They must be embarrassed, I don't want to put them in that position. And instead they're like, no, we like it when you're there because someday knows our name and because somebody will notice if we are not there tomorrow. And I thought, okay, you know. So, I did, I continued going because it brought them some sort of comfort. And they are only known by numbers. So in there, in a bar it's just like you'd be in the grad at Chico. You go to order your drinks and you're handed a slip and you can write down the number of the girl that you like and you pay a bar fee for her. Bar fees range from \$15 to \$50. And I would sit in the bars and I would drink, you know, orange juice and with these men right next to me where they're soliciting sex that are drinking orange juice too, and, yeah, they are checking out with a girl. It was everything in me, I've never had such innate battle between myself. I don't know what I would have done if I had weapon. I feel like I have the enough rage in me to really want to take it to them. And so I had that huge battle between compassion and rage. That was a unique experience. I don't think anything could have prepared me for going into these situations. But that's why we tried to provide the young women who did step out of the bars, we tried to provide them.





We always give them access to education. So whether they wanted to finish their sixth grade education or their high school graduation or education or they wanted to go to university, we try to make those opportunities as available as we could. This is one of the ways we did that. The girls would make--they would to piece work, they would also make table runners, we would bring them back to United States to sell it because you can make a lot more money for them. They were all given training in technical skills or education.



We took some of the young women to a village because I really wanted to see this process. And so we took some of the young women, there were 7 living with us at that time, to a village that's very much like the villages that they came from. And we are there, we are teaching them about brushing their teeth, about hygiene and this was like the community center that we were at.



Sai is one of the girls. She is in the bottom left hand corner, one of the girls.



But as I watch these children, I realized that is who will be in the brothels in a year or 2 years or 3 years. And that was extremely profound for me, too. It's like if we don't figure out something else for these people, there's always enough supply. Like we have to change the demand. That became really about educating men about what buying sex does and what it perpetuates.





This is an example of one of the homes in the village.





This is a great grandmother and her granddaughter.



And the cows.



Which is what the whole village would sustain on--that one cow.



At Christmas time, the women that I worked for had...(actually I'll tell you, yeah). At Christmas time, the woman I worked for, they have this dream to host a Christmas party. And so they are talking to me about it when I was there and I'm like, I'm on, I'm on board. I've got people at home, I'll e-mail them. And so I did. I send an e-mail home and I said, why not buy a girl out of a bar for a Christmas? You know, instead of another Christmas mug with chocolates in it--who really needs that anyway? You could really--you could buy a girl out of a bar. And so I send an e-mail out there and my mom was handling it. She e-mailed me back and she's like you've got \$3,000 in your account right now. And so we did this within a few weeks. We're like, okay, we could really do something like that. And so we rented out the space and we decided we were going to have a dinner catered for them and have prizes and see what happens. And so we did. We set up everything and we were really excited about it. And then we told the girls in our English class about it.





So these are some of the girls in my English class. We told them about it and they were so excited. And so we're like we will come to you, we'll come find you at the bar that you work out and we'll pay your bar fine, because they can't just skip work, they can't just miss work. They are only allowed to have--they can only miss 8 bar fines in a month or they are in big trouble. They have to have at least 8 bar fines paid. So we didn't want to have them in trouble at all. And so we're like we'll come find you, I will come and pay for you to come to the party. And the party is not until 4, we told all the girls to come about 4. And this about 1:30. I get a knock on door and the girls are all there. They've already paid their own bar fines and I don't even know how they got out of it, but they did. And they were all dressed up and they brought their friends. And between their second day, when I was teaching English, Bo is actually--can I walk away? This is Bo. So she was a young woman who came with her friend and this is Pin [phonetic], her friend. She was the one that I'd gotten to know really well in the first couple days of English, and I continued to build a relationship with her, and throughout my time there. And then she stops coming. I watch the [inaudible] sparkles were faded from her eyes and I kind of watched the lights just sucked out of her. She became more and more reserved and less and less engaged. And so I hadn't seen her for about 4 or 5 weeks by the time our Christmas party was coming around. And she showed up for the Christmas party! And it was a gift to me to be able to see her. So we wound up going in and these girls [inaudible] were so excited and they were already there and ready to go.



So my job was to actually go in (to the bars) because I am white, I can go purchase women. And so I went in with wads full of cash and we paid for 98 girls that night to come out. And that was an extremely intense situation. I had 2 Thai, Thai middle class gals that came with me. They were helping translate because there's a huge trust system that you have to build relationship obviously before someone will trust you. And so, anyway, they were there to help me explain, because they thought they were being bought to go and serve in a Christmas party and be like the "party favors" for the guests. And so they were reluctant to go with me because all of them have hard trafficking stories and all of them have had friends who've gone to a party and never come back. And so it was a miracle that we really got them, that got them to come. We had exactly 100 seats at the party and we had 98 girls that came. We sold out 2 full bars like 2 bars, all the girls wanted to come. And so, I had to actually negotiate with the bar owners who are Westerners, one was a man from Britain and one was a man actually from Montana. And I wound up in a huge discussion and argument but wound up--he let all the girls go. And the other one I wound up in a discussion and he didn't let all the girls go. And at one point, I just had to, I had to walk away from the situation because I thought it was escalating too much. It was probably one of the hardest things I've ever done was walk away and tell the 2 girls that were left there to serve their customers.



So these are the girls, they are signing in for the party and they came and sat down.





We had all kinds of giveaways and they couldn't believe what was going on, neither could the wait staff. The people who were hired to serve them could not believe what we were doing because the Thai prostitutes are very low on the totem pole of any sort of honor or respect. And so they can't believe what we are doing and were actually really uncomfortable with it at first. But it was the first time that many of these girls that we've seen laugh and cry and enjoy each other's company. I got to sit at the table with Bo and I'm—I just started bowing. I couldn't contain it anymore. And many of the girls that we worked with just have no emotion. Just they smile and everyone thinks they're happy but they're really good at faking it. And so it was pretty incredible to be there because there was genuine emotion being shown. And anyway, they, the house that I worked out now has 17 girls that are leaving there, they've expanded and they've kept it at 17 because there's just no more emotional space. The women have so many things to deal with and they are used to competing against each other for survival. And so there's such not anymore emotional space in the house that would take more. And this past Christmas they have 300. They had to do 2 Christmas parties. They had 300 at one and 250 at the other. And so it becomes something that these girls really look forward to. It's like one night that they get to be off. And as we left this, that one bar that we had 19 girls come from, and I was in a disputed discussion with the owner, they wound up—as they were leaving, we cleaned up. They all left, we cleaned up and then we drove back and every one of those girls are sitting back on their stool.





And I broke 'cause I was like, we gave you a night of freedom, you know, and one of the girls next to me just said, "Michelle, where do you expect them to go?" Like what do you expect them to do? You know, they don't have a home to go home to, they live together on this mats, like 6 girls to like 2 mats. You know, tiny, tiny spaces and under the bars and under--this is not even near living conditions. And I just thought, "Oh," like it hit me again like this is their life. It's not just something that they're choosing to do, it's not something that they're--it's their reality. So, I wound up to--I left to come home about 3 days after this and I was packing up and getting ready and I was kind of in a daze because I didn't know what to do with going home. I was afraid to come home because I didn't know what to do with what I've seen. Bo, that young woman, I had overheard someone and I was understanding enough Thai to understand what they are saying. And so I heard her and this woman saying, "Oh, Bo wanted to say goodbye to Michelle" and I was like, "What?" You know, and so at this point, it was about 9 p.m. and we made a goal to be out of the bars by at least by about 8 because things got pretty bad. And so we wound up--I was like, I'm going to go, I'm going to go talk to her. And so I wound up, I wound up going and finding the bar that she work out and I saw the young woman outside and I said, "Can I talk to Bo?" And she said, "Well, she's with a customer" and she disappeared. And then a few minutes later, Bo came out and Bo is wearing nothing. She is like in a little tiny g-string outfit. She had her number tattooed in it, pinned on herself. And she is bowing and just giving me a hug. And I thought, oh, my gosh. You know the--I don't even know. I'm walking away from this right now and there is nothing I can do, I can't take her with me. And she was summoned back in for her customer. And I--that's what I left with.



So, I guess I'll stay there 'cause that's kind of how I felt when I got home. I didn't know what to do with it and I came home 2 days before Christmas. And I—I'm sorry, I'll always be emotional when I talk about it. And some people, say, "You know, you shouldn't be so sad like there's just nothing--it's such a big issue." And my response is usually like "God forbid, I ever stop being sad about these girls and their plight because if I don't care who will?" And this--it's easy to look at the numbers, 27 million people that are trafficked. And think, it's way too big of an issue but it's not if I'm willing to put myself out there and to choose the way that I live. And that became my journey when I got home. I came back 2 days before Christmas and I really didn't talk about my experiences much. Because I didn't know how, I didn't know how to talk about it. And most people when they ask you about how your trip to Thailand was, they don't want to know. They don't want to know that my heart was ripped out. And so I didn't talk about it much really at all. I wound up a few days after Christmas, I was shopping with some friends and life is normal, you know, it's normal and it was easier for me to compartmentalize and to not really process to what it looks like here because I didn't know how to do that. And so I was at the Gap and one of--I was like, that was a cute coat and I dropped \$100 dollars on a coat. And I got home and I bawled because I thought, what did I learn? Like what did I just take from experience and how am I coming home and going right back to everything that all people are, I mean, talking about is how they didn't get the iPod for Christmas so they're bummed that, you know, they're--I don't know, my best friend is planning a wedding and she's like I don't know if I should have white or cream?



And I'm like, I don't know how to deal with this right now. And so it became a real process and that day that I went into definitely a depression because I didn't know what to do with it. And the day that I started school that comic was up on the board, that Calvin and Hobbes comic that just says "Ignorance is bliss!" That's the key to happiness, and I was like that's exactly how I'm feeling. If I could just pretend like I didn't know what I saw and I could go back to life and be perfectly fine. That I was like I was given a gift in this experience and now I have a choice. I have a choice to make. Whether I really want to reexamine my life or whether I just want to like a Facebook group that says I'm against trafficking but still shop at stores that use trafficked people or slaved, enslaved people to make those products. And so I went on an adventure. And I'm still on that adventure. But I love what Justin was sharing because one of the things that I really was struck by was William Wilberforce's story. And William Wilberforce was an abolitionist to the greatest extent, starting when he was 26. And he basically gave his life. He got really sick, he gave his life up to fight for people to be freed from slavery. So I started reading this book at the recommendation of a friend because they're like, you know, Michelle, what he did wasn't so much that he stopped the slave trade, that's not really what he did because obviously slavery still exists. But what he did was he changed the mindset that allowed slavery to be acceptable. And that is, that is what is so amazing that William Wilberforce gave his life for. And they're like you could give your life for that that you can do that. You can go and talk to people and really challenge them on these ideas because I think that we like to--it's easy. It's easy living in America and we're wealthy that--I mean, like, we have air conditioning.





So the climate, you know, if it's hot, we turn on the air conditioning. If it's cold, we turn on the heater, we get another jacket. But these people do not have that luxury. And so I started going on this journey. I turned all my class assignments into educating myself more because one thing if nothing else what I learn when I was there was that everything has been interconnected, climate change, pornography, is in my opinion is extremely tied to human trafficking. It depends on who you talk to. I'm convinced because of the research that I've done and the experiences I had that it is deeply tied to it. So I did a persuasive speech in argumentation and debate. I chose pornography and I went up and told the 22-year-old guys in my class like. if you viewed porn, internet porn that's--there's blood on your hands. And I got that there's not a lot of respect from that. But I also was like, they will never click on another site without thinking about that. I just turned all my assignments into something I could learn. I got papers on...If I don't know where I can't buy--if I'm buying items that are made by trafficked individuals, then I'm going to find out which ones are doing it well so I know that I can buy from them. It turns out the Gap was okay. I was doing my research so I didn't feel quite bad about my jacket. But I still think about that all the time because it's so connected.





These are numbers that you guys are familiar with. How many of you have been here in the last few days? Yeah. So you're aware of human trafficking. You know all that this is about.



And to be honest, I didn't bother changing these numbers--these are from 2008. But it is now what, the second most lucrative, is it second already? Yeah. So 3 years ago it wasn't the second; now it is. It's a huge industry.



These are all kids I spent time with.



This is in 2008 but the number of child pornography websites has doubled over the past 6 years.

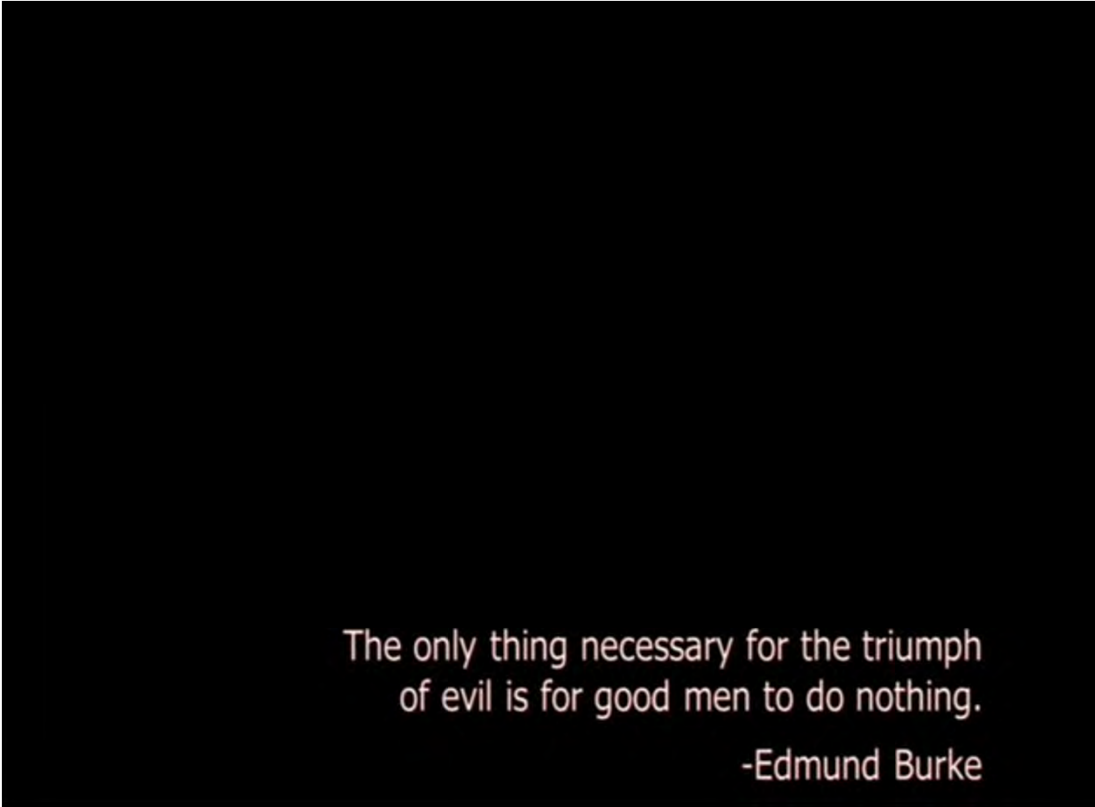




Of the sites reported globally, half are based here in United States.



Beyond that, legal porn just exasperates me. Legal porn exacerbates and increases the demand for sex because it sexualizes women, and younger and younger and younger girls.

A large black rectangle occupies the upper half of the page. Inside the rectangle, at the bottom, is a quote in white text.

The only thing necessary for the triumph  
of evil is for good men to do nothing.  
-Edmund Burke

And from tracing subscribers on their credit cards, most are found here in the United States that use internet porn.



And so, anyway, this is other research but really, the thing that I came back with was like all these issues are interrelated.





So what do we do about poverty, hunger, exploitation, climate change? And people couldn't keep up with me because I came home from Thailand and I'm all like human trafficking. And I quickly was like, "Wow, what do I do here?" And so I went out bought clean canteens. You know, I was like, I'm going to start recycling because I think it's part of stewarding. If I want to be an abolitionist, I can't do that and still have habits that are not--that don't coincide with that. I can't be very wasteful and an extremely unconscientious consumer and say I'm an abolitionist. And that's actually one thing that drives me crazy and I can get really, really worked up about is always to the "liking" anti-trafficking things on Facebook. But if I ask, well, where did you get that, you know, where's your favorite store? Because if you don't want stop shopping at your favorite store, do not "like" a Facebook anti-trafficking thing. That's how I really think we need to examine our lifestyles and if we really want to be an abolitionist. I love what Justin was saying--studying our conversation, reevaluating our impact, being intentional, using our purchasing power, getting outside of ourselves and having conversations. I love Edmund Burke's quote. "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." And I recognize how easy it is to just do nothing 'cause it's so much easier. If you don't want--if you don't want to be heartbroken, don't, don't, don't start because it's so much easier to live just like Calvin and Hobbes, in that ignorance is bliss. And if you start down the path, it will ruin your life in many ways, and, you know what, I don't regret it for a second. I don't regret, I don't regret the people that I met or the stories that I've heard or how many tears I've shed because it is what makes us human. And I think that our wealth and our ability to be isolated from people, whether it's an iPod or all the time on the phone or you're just on Facebook constantly—as long as you are isolated from people it's what allows us to be able to

continue these behaviors that are dehumanizing. And so, anyway, that's kind of my thought.

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OUR LIVES BEGIN TO END THE DAY WE BECOME SILENT ABOUT  
THE THINGS THAT MATTER. —MLK JR.

But I'll show you this again 'cause I love it and I think it's so good. That was one thing I felt like I could have--I could have left Thailand and left that compartmentalized--and I could still, I can still walk away from it. But I don't want to choose the ignorant route because although it's bliss, it's--it's not what I want for my life and I have a lot of my life to live, I hope. Martin Luther King said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter." And I love what Justin shared--the idea of something that they've created that allows us to go and see our impact. It's, that's awesome. And it's lonely, it's lonely to be someone who cares. It's lonely often to really not be wearing the latest fashions because I want to make sure that what I'm purchasing is conscientious. It's lonely when you go to the mall with friends and everyone's like, whoa! You know, and I'm like, "Oh, sorry, I'm not, I'm not going to spend my money here because I'd rather do something else with that." And there's a tension between not living under the guilt either, because we aren't responsible for it but our lives impact it for sure. And so, recognizing that our awareness is the biggest gift you can give to anyone in the world. Quickly, I've had this experience in Thailand. I've lived other places, since, in Africa and Eastern Europe and seeing these things all over the world. And the thing I keep coming back to is the biggest impact you can have is locally, really. And so, I wound up starting, I started a tutoring program. And so, right now we have community members, because that's the thing is there's the haves and the have nots, and there's not many bridges between the two. There are people who like to talk about what's going on but they're not actually connected to the people to whom it's happening.

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And so, I started a tutoring program and we have 160 community members now that work with at-risk kids here in Chico. The illiteracy rate in Chico is 40 percent or higher in our elementary school kids. And so there's a crisis that's going on right here too. Like Kate [Transchel] will talk about all the different--the numbers of the United States. It's incredibly--but those are the kids, those are the kids that will be targeted to be trafficked to in the United States. And I don't think this problem is going to ever go away. I think it's something that it really takes us becoming, being willing to become comfortable and put ourselves in a position to make a change. So that's my spiel. My email is up there because--I love--email me. We can have coffee, we can hang out. I'll send you where places I've gone. I'm always happy to talk about this and to wrestle with these conversations. So feel free to contact me any time. [Inaudible] Kate, you already have my information. And that is--that's it. Any questions? Are there thoughts or reactions?





**Audience member:** What was the name of this town in Thailand?

**Michelle Anderson Curran:** I actually won't give that out because for safety of the girls and that's why I don't have pictures and I might add, that's why I don't have pictures of all the women facing front, there's a few, but there's been some crazy stories. Walking down the street in Thailand is just like coming to Chico state. The only difference was that there were little, little Asian, Asian women on the arms of these white, white men. But so, I never know where people are and if they've been there. And so, I try to be really careful about that. But yeah, but if you want to know, I can hook you up with some other organizations there. Anyone else? Yeah.

**Audience member:** I'm going to say please keep sharing your stories. What was the typical age of the women?

**Michelle Anderson Curran:** I wish I could say it's typical, but, yeah. So what is the typical age group of the women? I, where I work in was, when I was in the bars actually, the youngest I said I saw was about 10, 10 to 12. But they look much younger and so that's the tricky part. The women I worked with were up to their 40s, 40s and 50s. And then the ones that run the bars, actually the day-to-day operations, are older women who've timed out of being able to be sold for sex and so they become the ones who are selling the girls. So they're 50s, 60s. And then I know that there were documented stories of girls that were sold as young as 2 and 3 and I'm sure younger. But they're not sold in the open. I wasn't even allowed back there because I hadn't purchased sex and so I wasn't allowed back that deep in the bars. But are there other thoughts, real quick? I know we have another presenter, Asara. Questions, comments? Okay.

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**Audience member:** I just have a comment, [inaudible] like how can I make a difference about when you're sharing about the Christmas stories like one day in their life.