

The White Umbrella

Walking with Survivors of Sex Trafficking

MARY FRANCES BOWLEY

MOODY PUBLISHERS

CHICAGO

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Editors by James Lund and
Stephanie S. Smith of (In)dialogue Communications
Interior and Cover Design: Design Corps
Cover Images: is 8312404 / is 19697806 / is 13708083 /
stock - illustration - 18632439
Author Photo: Melissa White

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bowley, Mary Frances.
The white umbrella : walking with survivors of sex trafficking / Mary
Frances Bowley.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-0-8024-0859-4
1. Child trafficking. 2. Sexually abused girls. 3. Sexually abused children.
I. Title.
HQ281.B69 2012
362.76—dc23

2012028542

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1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America

Dedicated to my Savior, Jesus Christ, who opened His covering of love and sacrifice so that I might experience a precious relationship with God.

*To my best friend, Dick Bowley, who has supported the work of Wellspring Living since its inception.
He is my sounding board, my prayer warrior, and the love of my life!*

To every compassionate person who has been willing to open your life to a hurting person and walk beside him or her.

*To Martha Jeane Giglio, who embodied the life of an intercessor for Wellspring Living.
Martha Jeane's dedication through prayer was and continues to be an inspiration to me.*

To every girl or woman who has experienced sexual abuse and exploitation and has had the courage to walk through recovery. May this book encourage you to allow the umbrella of God's love and caring people to strengthen you for the rest of your life.

Contents

A Note from the Author	9
Foreword	11
The Story behind the White Umbrella	15
1. Her Story	21
2. They're Still Little Girls	29
3. We All Can Do Something	39
4. My Story	49
5. Her Battle	61
6. She Heals at Her Own Pace	73
7. Peeling Back the Layers	81
8. Her Fight for Justice	89
9. Healing Comes Full Circle	103
10. We Must Build Trust	113
11. We Must Do Whatever It Takes	121
12. We Will Face Obstacles	133
13. We Become Her Community	143
14. We Can Be Creative	155
15. Pray for Her	165
16. Believe in Her	175
17. Stand with Her	183
18. The Roller-Coaster Ride to Restoration	193
Notes	197
Acknowledgments	199

A Note from the Author

All of the stories in this book are true. Many of the names and a few minor details have been altered to protect the girls we serve.

Profits from the sales of *The White Umbrella* will go directly to Wellspring Living to further its work in confronting the issue of childhood sexual abuse and exploitation through awareness, training, and treatment for girls and women. Wellspring Living strategies include:

- Offering survivors a safe haven where they receive therapy, personalized education, life skills, and spiritual renewal
- Advocating for victims—to give a voice to the voiceless and confront the issue of sexual exploitation
- Sharing best practices with others by training organizations to assist in building programs that serve survivors of childhood sexual abuse and exploitation

Wellspring Living desires to embody servant leadership, unrelenting compassion, community mindedness, comprehensive service, excellent care, and strong faith.

white ('hwīt, 'wīt) adj.

Free from spot or blemish as (1) free from moral impurity:

INNOCENT (2) marked by the wearing of white by the woman
as a symbol of purity.

um·brel·la (əm-'bre-lə) n.

1. A device for protection from the weather consisting of a
collapsible, usually circular canopy mounted on a central rod.

2. Something that covers or protects.

Foreword

Life on planet earth is not as it should be. I don't think anyone reading these words will argue that assumption. Though imagined and created by a beautiful and perfect Creator, our lives and our world have been ravished by the damaging effects of our fallen pride. As a result, we each navigate our days in a broken planet, one that leaves innocent people marginalized and wounded, victims of the brutality and abuse of others. One specific result of the mayhem is the staggering number of women and girls who are bought and sold each day under the ruthless control of others and for their captors' financial gain.

In fact, as you will discover within these pages, not only are women and girls being bought and sold, chances are it's happening a lot closer than you think to where you are right now.

While accepting that shattered lives surround us, too often we give in to the false notion that one person can't really make a huge difference in such a messed-up world. This weak rationalization, most likely nothing more than a cover-up for our selfish ways, fashions the blinders that protect our eyes and keep our hands clean. As long as we are convinced that "somebody like me" can't really do anything to turn the tide, we can continue to exist in our self-made bubbles of comfort and ignore God's beating heart. Yet throughout history, in the dark night of need, God awakens ordinary people to the torrent of His love, shattering the silence and fueling in their hearts an unquenchable desire to spread the love they've found to the broken and discarded. One such warrior of love is my friend Mary Frances Bowley. While many

The White Umbrella

regard Mary Frances as a hero (an apt description), what I really want you to know about her is that she is someone just like you. She's what you'd call a "normal" person who was living a comfortable "Christian" life until the very real plight of sexual slavery stood right in front of her with a face and a name.

In that moment, everything changed for Mary Frances; and from that moment she has set out to change everything. As you'll read, Mary Frances went on to found Wellspring Living, a fledgling dream of hope that has now blossomed into a nationally recognized titan force of rescue, restoration, and renewal for lives once torn.

I first came to know about Wellspring Living from my mom, Martha Jeane Giglio. A legendary intercessor, Mom would always tell me about the young women she met while leading devotions at the home run by Mary Frances's organization. Though she protected the details of their stories, she would tell our family she was praying for certain girls, believing God for their healing even when the young women weren't ready to take that stand for their own lives. Mom wrote all their names and prayer requests in a spiral notebook she kept by her bed. Toward the end of her life on earth, when hospital stays became frequent, she always wanted to make sure we'd grab her Bible and that notebook and bring them along. One night, a day or so after fairly serious surgery, I walked into Mom's hospital room and found her holding the notebook open to a page where a young woman had written her prayer requests in her own handwriting. Mom's eyes were closed and she was lost in heaven contending for a precious young lady before the throne of grace and mercy of God.

God's heart breaks for the 27 million men, women, and children worldwide who are trapped in some form of slavery. It's horrifying and absurd to think that there are currently more slaves on earth than

at any other time in human history. But once that massive number overwhelms your heart, take a step back and consider that each one of them has a face and a name. While it may be impossible for any one of us to reach and rescue every one of them, each one of us can certainly make a difference in one precious life.

Slavery must end, and it must end now. Fortunately, the solutions are not beyond our reach. They just require that you raise your White Umbrella of hope and action right where you are. Together, we can be and will be a force for good, a sea of freedom fighters blanketing the world with the blinding light of His great love.

Mary Frances has paved the way for us all; so lean forward and let her story propel and guide you as you raise your voice for freedom and liberty for all. As there is for her and for my mom and for me, there is a place for you in this fight.

Louie Giglio

Pastor, Passion City Church, Atlanta



The Story behind the White Umbrella

You hear the terms. *Sex trafficking. Human trafficking. Sex trade. Sexual slavery.* If you think about it at all, you figure it's something that goes on in places like India, Cambodia, Russia, and Latin America. Not anywhere close to home. Not here.

Sadly, you are wrong.

The FBI reports that in the United States, the number of children, usually girls, who are forced to do someone's sexual bidding is well over 100,000. The age range is nine to nineteen. The average age is just eleven years old.¹

Some of these kids are runaways and some are abandoned. Many others come from "good" homes. They are the victims of cruel and clever predators who know just what to offer—the appearance of friendship, a listening ear, the promise of love or money or a new life.

Some girls are even lured from their own driveways. That's what happened to Debbie, a fifteen-year-old from Phoenix who earned straight As at school. One minute she was talking to a casual friend just outside her house. The next minute, the "friend" and two men were pushing Debbie into a car, where she was bound and gagged. She was held captive for more than forty days and forced to have sex with several men daily until a tip led to her rescue.²

We're talking about Americans kidnapping Americans. How can this be happening to our friends, sisters, and daughters? It's outrageous, disgusting, and frightening. It's also big business. Worldwide, the sex trade generates an estimated \$32 billion in income each year. It is second behind only the drug industry as the world's leading criminal enterprise.³ It is what the FBI calls an epidemic.⁴

Sex trafficking isn't just going on "out there" somewhere. It's happening in your state. Maybe even your town.

And it's time we did something about it.

For most of my years, I was completely unaware of the sexual slave trade and the desperate lives of so many young women. I was a mom, wife, and kindergarten and Bible teacher, with no aspirations to do anything outside my bubble of a life in Peachtree City, Georgia, the golf cart capitol of the South. But in 1993, all that changed. A gentleman in my church told me about a local hairdresser who needed help. Sara was dealing with a desperate family situation and couldn't handle it alone. I decided to talk to Sara, to get to know her, to show her I cared. *I'll buy her a Christian book, I thought. She'll read it and understand that God loves her. That will make things better.*

But as I got to know Sara and her struggles, I realized that nothing I'd encountered prepared me to help her put back together the pieces of her broken life. I'd grown up in a strong Christian home and attended every church activity on the calendar—choir practices, mission programs, vacation Bible schools. My background didn't qualify me to help her "fix" it.

Now *I* was the desperate one. What was I supposed to do?

That's when God stepped in. Though I wouldn't have described it like this at the time, He was introducing me to a new idea: the white umbrella.

An umbrella is a common item, usually left forgotten in the back of a closet until needed. But when nature delivers a downpour or hailstorm, an umbrella makes a difference—a buffer that protects us from the harsh elements falling from the sky. An umbrella often does something else as well—it brings those who suffer together. When you share one with someone, you have to stand close, side by side.

That's what I needed to do for Sara. I needed to share my “umbrella” by standing close and providing cover as best I could. Some weeks that meant spending time with her daughters. Other times it meant bringing meals or offering transportation. I learned that helping Sara wasn't about a formula for fixing her or her situation; it was simply about being available to stand with her during the storms of life, letting her know that I was there—and that God was there too.

Soon my eyes were opened to the plight of many more young women who were struggling against the storms. So many girls, I discovered, grew up in homes marked by emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. These girls were hurting. They were in despair. They'd lost hope.

They needed cover. They needed a chance.

I knew I couldn't help them all. I knew I couldn't do it alone. I wasn't sure we could help any of them. But maybe, I thought, we could make a small difference for a few. Or even one. Just one.

As unlikely as it seemed, these vague ideas turned into a passion that would not let me go. I prayed about it. I talked with other women from our church. I talked with everyone I knew. Soon, I was joining with forty other women who shared a desire to reach beyond the walls of our church to try to help young women in need. We decided to call our nonprofit program Wellspring Living, after the living water Jesus promised to the Samaritan woman at the well.

That was over a decade ago. Today, Atlanta-based Wellspring Living serves as a recovery home for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, an outpatient counseling center, and a safe place for women escaping from unsafe situations as they look for new options.

And, since 2008, we have offered a program for child survivors of forced prostitution and sex trafficking. Throughout this book, you will notice that I often refer to the clients we work with as “girls.” This is because, regardless of literal age, the children and women who come to Wellspring Living are all wounded little girls inside. Once a girl is molested, she is emotionally arrested at that age, making her vulnerable to unhealthy people and giving her a tendency of making life choices based on the age at abuse. We also refer to them often as “our girls” out of the great love, respect, and community we are privileged to share with them day to day.

The foundation of what we do is our network of volunteers—we wouldn’t exist without them. Somewhere near you is a program similar to Wellspring Living that needs *your* help. There are a thousand ways to get involved. You can drive a girl to a doctor appointment. You can teach her how to cook. You can donate clothes, furniture, or money. You can pray for her and with her. You can simply listen and treat her with love and respect. For her, it may be an entirely new experience.

My heart aches for these girls. So many have been battered, bruised, and abused. They have weathered storms few of us can imagine. They are often suspicious of relationships and offered help. They do not smile or trust easily. They have been betrayed too many times. To survive, they have learned to be tough. Yet underneath the hard exterior is the loving person God intended them to be.

Who will help these young women stand against the storms? I believe it’s up to you and me.

To me, a white umbrella is the perfect symbol. The color white represents purity—the purity these girls still possess and the motivation we have, without any agenda, to help them recover it. Our volunteers respect these young ladies as people. They look beneath the surface to glimpse the person God created them to be. Part of our call is portraying their innocence and worth to others who might not believe in them.

The umbrella represents protection against the storms and our willingness to stand with these girls shoulder to shoulder. Girls who have been trafficked live in a whirlwind of chaos and crisis. Like a tornado, you can't understand it unless you're in it. Our courageous volunteers and staff hold an umbrella over these young women, providing cover and letting them know they're not alone.

This book tells the stories of girls who are victims of the dark underworld of sex trafficking and of the volunteers and caregivers who try to cover them with the love of Jesus. More importantly, it shows what you can do to help.

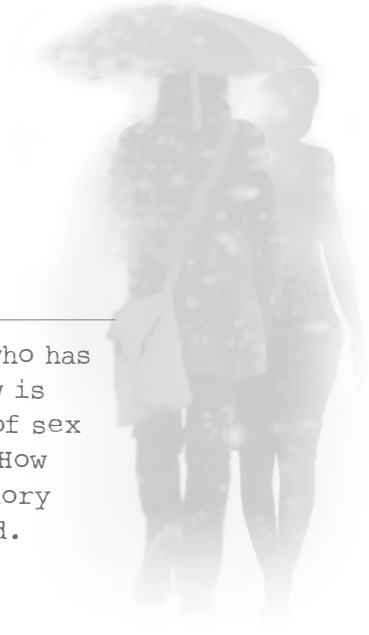
Being involved is hard. It is a journey with many twists and turns. More than an adventure, it is a quest—a calling that does not allow you to return to normal, humdrum life. A calling that beckons you to step outside your comfortable bubble to reach out to those who are desperate in the storm.

Are you ready to embark on the quest of your life? If so, I invite you to open and share your white umbrella of grace and love.



01~ Her Story

What goes on in the mind of a child who has suffered abuse and abandonment? How is she enticed into the sleazy sphere of sex trafficking? How does she survive? How can we reach out to her? Shelia's story is our first glimpse into that world.



As hard as I try, I can't forget that first night. I was seven years old. I'd put on my Princess Ariel pajamas and brushed my teeth. I'd climbed into bed with my white stuffed pony, the one I always slept with, the one my dad had given me two years before when my parents split up. I knew my mom wouldn't come to say good night because she was on a business trip. So it didn't surprise me when Brad, my stepdad, came to my room instead.

But I was surprised, and scared, when he turned off the light and crawled under the covers with me. "Shelia, we're going to play a game," he said.

Only it wasn't a game.

Brad began touching me in places he wasn't supposed to touch. I didn't understand what was happening. I was confused and too scared to say anything. Brad was so much bigger than me, and he had a temper.

When he finished, he made me promise to not tell anyone about

The White Umbrella

our “game.” If I did, he said, he’d hurt my mom and Sarah, my little sister. I believed him.

For the rest of my elementary school years and into middle school, the game continued. The only way I got through those nights was to think about something else. It only happened when my mom was gone or out of town. She never suspected a thing.

Outside of my home, I lived a normal life. I made good grades, played sports, and had a few close friends. But on the inside, I felt dirty and worthless. I felt like I needed to hide. Sometimes I wanted to die.

If anyone had paid attention, they might have noticed how the light in my face had been extinguished. I never laughed and rarely smiled. I swayed back and forth between screaming inside for attention and help, and not wanting to be known at all. How would I know if a person was safe? How could I ever trust again? Mom was gone a lot, and even when she was home, she fought with Brad most of the time. She didn’t seem to have much energy for me.

By the time I was twelve years old, the chaos and pain were too much. I couldn’t take it anymore. I was sure there had to be something better outside the walls of my home. I was worried about Sarah, but I had to get away from Brad. I thought I could find someone who would care for me, someone who saw value in me. I ran away.

The Nicest Man

Suddenly, I was alone. I had no food and no place to sleep. But it wasn’t long before I met the nicest man. He bought me a cheeseburger at McDonald’s. I was so hungry I ate three of them.

The man’s name was Michael. He wore a heavy jacket and a blue stocking cap. He was a big man, but he had a soft voice, not like Brad’s at all.

“Shelia, you don’t seem like the other girls I see on that street,” he said.
“You’re pretty and you seem really smart. How did you end up out here?”

Before I knew it, I was telling Michael everything about me. I’d finally met someone I could open up to, someone who understood me. He seemed to know that I needed someone like him to take care of me. He offered a place to stay. I couldn’t believe it. I actually had someone I could trust to help me. I didn’t have to stay silent and scared anymore.

Michael took me to a fancy townhome. There were seven other girls my age there. I thought, *This is like a boarding place for girls who need help.* I never noticed that the doors were bolted from the outside.

Around 10 p.m., Michael said he and the other girls needed to go out for a while. He told me to make myself at home. I made a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and sat down to watch TV. It felt great to be alone and safe.

About thirty minutes later, the front door opened. Three men staggered in, laughing. “Well, hi there, honey,” one said. His words were friendly, but his voice was not. These men made me nervous. Something didn’t seem right.

My instinct was correct. All of a sudden, one of the men grabbed me by the arm and roughly steered me into a bedroom. Before I knew what was happening, they pushed me onto the bed and held me down. They pulled my clothes off. Then they raped me repeatedly.

A few minutes later, I was alone and shaking. *What is happening to me?* I thought. *This can’t be real.* Finally, I got the courage to get my clothes on and start moving. I had to get out of there, get back to the streets. But when I tried to open the door, nothing happened. I realized it was locked from the other side.

I was trapped.

An Unending Circus

When Michael returned later, it was as if the night had turned him into a different person. It turned out he wasn't nice at all. He told me that I would have to "earn my keep," that this was the way it worked in his world. He would take me to a place, and I would service every man who walked into the room. My life was spinning out of control.

The next night, Michael put me and the seven other girls into a van. Sure enough, he dropped each girl off at a different place. I noticed that each time a girl entered a house or apartment, a man stood guard just outside the door.

I was the last one to be left. The apartment was dark and smelled of sweat and smoke. In just a few minutes, a man entered, and I did what he said. I had no choice. The scene was repeated again and again. I don't even know how many men came in that night. The only way I could endure the pain was by thinking about something else, just like I did with Brad. At the end of the night, which was actually morning, Michael picked me up. He said I'd done well, that I'd brought in a thousand dollars. I was relieved. Maybe, I thought, this would be the only time I'd have to live through a nightmare like this.

I was wrong. The next night it was the same scenario, and the night after that, and the night after that. The circus was unending. Most of the time, I had little to eat. To make sure we were "productive," Michael put drugs in our drinks. The drugs made us stay awake for days at a time. It all seemed to go on forever. Nights turned into weeks, weeks into months.

About five months later, on a Tuesday night, I was dropped off at a different apartment. I went in and began to prepare myself to separate my mind from what was about to happen. There was a knock on the door. It was Sanchez, the man who always stood guard to make sure I didn't run away.

“Our first customer is late,” he said.

Suddenly I was alone at the apartment. In the early days, I’d fantasized many times about escaping, but there had always been someone watching. Besides, where would I go? Michael and Sanchez would find me and probably kill me. Before long I’d given up hope of ever getting away.

But now, unexpectedly, there was a chance. I checked the locks in the apartment, barely daring to hope, when I discovered the bathroom window was unlocked. I remembered seeing a fire station a couple of blocks away from the apartment. It hadn’t meant anything then, but now I wondered. Could I really do it? Would they be able to protect me? Could I get there without being seen?

I climbed on the toilet and was able to squeeze through the window. My heart hammered so loud I was sure someone would hear or see me. My fear mounting with each step, I found myself walking to the entrance of the complex and into the street.

Once I reached the sidewalk, I broke into a run. It was the longest two blocks I’d ever covered. Finally, though, I reached the firehouse and pounded on the door. When a man in a blue fire department uniform answered, I burst into tears.

“Please help me!” I cried.

I don’t know exactly what I expected, but the “help” they provided wasn’t what I’d hoped for. I ended up spending that night at a youth detention center. I remember walking into a cold, dark place with bars all around. Concrete walls and grey concrete floors surrounded me. After I was “processed,” I was taken to my room. It was so small. The bed was made of metal and had a thin, green, plastic cushion. There was a metal chair and metal sink and metal toilet and metal mirror. I was alone again, in the dark. My life had gone from bad to worse.

Is This What Love Feels Like?

After being in jail for about five days, a lady came to “evaluate” me. She asked a lot of questions. She told me that what had happened to me wasn’t my fault, and that I could go to a home where I would be safe, go to school, and get counseling. I thought, *I wasn’t born yesterday. Everyone who’s said they have something good for me has only used me.*

After the woman left, I continued to think about what she said. Even though I didn’t want to take the chance on going somewhere new, I didn’t want to stay in jail. What if I got out? Michael would surely find me. These last few days were the first I’d slept and eaten in a long time. The more I thought about my options, the more I thought maybe I should try this place.

So that Friday I was taken to the home and introduced to the staff. They seemed nice, but I kept up my guard. I would have my own room

I had never known
anyone who would do
something for me
without asking for
something in return.
It was like a dream.

and bathroom. The rooms were nice, but so was the first townhome my trafficker took me to. Could I trust them?

That first month, I resisted everyone’s attempts to reach out to me. I’m glad they didn’t

push themselves on me, but gave me room to get to know them and get comfortable in my new setting.

One thing that surprised me was that they worked hard to determine my past school credits and helped me create a plan to catch up on all I’d missed by being out of school for months. I found out later that they did this for each girl in the home. Each girl gets to choose what subjects she wants to work on and the teachers and volunteers help everyone stay on track.

Soon I met Becky, my counselor. She began to help me talk through everything that had happened to me. She helped me understand what I was truly created for. She believed that I was a person of value. In fact, everyone there seemed to think I was a great person. No one had ever had confidence in me. No one had ever been so patient with me. I had never known anyone who would do something for me without asking for something in return. It was like a dream.

Before long I was again excelling in school. I began to think there might be something to this program.

I kept waiting for things to change for the worse, like they always had in my life. But day after day, I encountered people who seemed to really care about me and believe in me. It wasn't just the staff. There were so many volunteers who came in each day either to help me with my classes or teach me something cool or help me dream about a career or maybe college someday.

Is this what love feels like? I wondered.

I pondered this question a lot. I knew there was something unusual about these people. They were different from any people I'd ever met. They all seemed to believe in God, but they didn't use a lot of "churchy" words. They just cared for me whether I was in a good mood or not, whether I made an A on a test or not, and whether I responded to their love or not. I hadn't thought much about God before. I didn't know if I believed in Him. But I started thinking it might be time to find out.

While I was in the program, I changed from a girl who was shy, scared, and silent to a girl who had learned to express herself, laugh out loud, and become confident in herself. I reconnected with my mom, who'd divorced Brad, and with Sarah. Months went by, and my graduation date approached. One of the volunteers asked if she could

The White Umbrella

be my mentor when I left the program. I really couldn't believe that! A person who was a stranger months ago now wanted to spend time with me.

I don't know what the future holds for me, and I still have occasional nightmares about my past. Sometimes it's still hard to trust people. But I'm working on it day by day. I can only say that my life is different because so many people reached out to me and believed in me. I know now that I'm not worthless—and that life just might be worth living again (www.thewhiteumbrellacampaign.com/video/#Everything).