



SOLD

HER INNOCENCE WAS BOUGHT
FOR THE PRICE OF A COCA-COLA

NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FINALIST

HYPERION
BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

SOLD

What led Patricia McCormick, a critically acclaimed U.S. children's book author, to take the long journey from the mountains of Nepal to the brothels of India?

In the past year or so, the trafficking of children has gotten a good deal of media attention. But nearly five years ago, when I had a chance meeting with a photographer who was documenting the presence of young girls in brothels overseas, I knew immediately that I wanted to do what no one else had done: tell this heartbreaking story from one girl's point of view.



Mothers working in the Himalayan rice fields.

There are organizations all over the world working to prevent trafficking and to rehabilitate survivors, but I decided that the best places to do my research were India and Nepal, because there is an active presence there by American organizations rescuing and rehabilitating women. And so, with a handful

of e-mails and the promise of a half dozen interviews, I booked a monthlong trip to India and Nepal, where I would trace the journey that takes more than 15,000 girls a year from the remote villages of the Himalayas to the brothels of Calcutta.

Having been trained as an investigative journalist, I took notes, photos, and tape recordings throughout my trip, observing the sights, the smells, the foods, the sounds, and the customs—details to give the book authenticity. It helped that I was a foreigner, because I was as bewildered and awestruck by the teeming streets of Kathmandu and Calcutta as my main character would be.



Rush hour in Calcutta.

I started in Nepal, a tiny kingdom in the grip of a violent insurgency. Almost immediately, I came face-to-face with jumpy soldiers poised behind sandbag lookouts. The newspaper carried daily stories of bombings and abductions in the very places I'd been the previous day. And many of the interviews I'd booked months before seemed to fall through once I arrived.



An aid worker seen here with a 12-year-old Nepali girl.

After days of being turned away at the Kathmandu shelter where I'd been expecting to interview girls who'd left the brothels, I eventually "bribed" my way in with a sackful of miniature bottles of shampoo and sample soaps I'd collected from my hotel. Once I made contact with the shelter director,

she invited me to travel to a remote village in the foothills of the Himalayas where aid workers went from hut to hut interviewing families about their missing daughters and explaining what may have really happened when they left for India in search of jobs.

Climbing up and down the steep footpaths of the village, and seeing the unforgivingly primitive conditions in which the villagers lived, I understood how a family could, through ignorance or need, believe that they were sending their daughters to a better life when they sent them to India.



"I saw how the morning routine of sending a child off to school is the same the world over: mothers braid hair; kids run pell-mell toward the school yard."

The highlight of that day was when the girls from the shelter brought out a boom box—a strange and wonderful novelty in a village where only a handful of families had even a bare lightbulb in their homes. Soon the whole village was gathered in a circle, as different groups of children took turns dancing. I stood off to the side taking notes and pictures, until a toothless old man spotted me and pulled me into the circle. It was an incredibly happy and human moment—dancing beneath the Himalayas, celebrating the power of music to transcend the differences between people.

But the most important and moving part of my research was the interviews I did with young women who have escaped or been rescued from the brothels of India—or who were thrown out when they became too ill to work. At first, the women were shy around me and responded to my questions about their experiences in the brothels with a polite but pointed silence.

Then one morning, two girls from the shelter came to my hotel and said they'd speak with me as long as I didn't use their names or take their pictures. They

spent the day with me, reliving the most horrific moments in their lives with a calm and a dignity that I can only describe as radiant.

When they were ready to go, I asked my translator the word for “sister.” I repeated the word and pointed to myself, then to each of them, so that they would understand that I was also a survivor of sexual abuse. They asked to hear my story and shook their heads with sadness as I explained. When I was finished, one of the girls pointed to my camera; it seemed she had changed her mind about having her picture taken. I would look at that picture every day during the next two years as I wrote the book.



The village men spend a better part of their day playing cards and gambling in a teashop.

Before leaving Kathmandu, I was also able to visit a prison, where I interviewed an ordinary-looking young man who stated nonchalantly that he had sold his girlfriend—because he wanted a motorcycle.

After leaving Nepal, I traveled to Calcutta and its notorious red-light district. My guide took me down a normal-looking commercial street, then ducked down a narrow alley that led to a warren of rooms around a courtyard littered with garbage, an open sewage drain, and laundry hanging out to dry.

I spent days there, interviewing the women—where they lived inside rooms with nothing more than a bed and a curtain across the doorway—as men came and went. Sometimes we had to vacate the room we were using if a customer arrived. As soon as dusk fell, the women told me to leave. Outside, on the main street, vendors were pulling the gates down on their stores and mothers were pulling their children inside from street games. Appearing in windows and

doorways all up and down the street were women in garish makeup and brightly colored saris, calling out to passersby. The neighborhood was transforming into the red-light district right before my eyes. Soon it would be teeming with men looking for a sexual encounter that might cost as little as a bottle of Coca-Cola.



Hidden down dark alleys are living quarters made of nothing more than cinder blocks and a tin roof. This is where the girls are forced to work as prostitutes.

Another day, my guide took me down a labyrinth of alleys and lanes until we came upon a tiny dirt yard in front of a crumbling green building. Inside was an after-school program for the children of the red-light district. They came running, barefoot and in rags, from their schools, for a few hours of singing, drawing in coloring books, or playing tag in the yard, before going home to the brothels. There, the littlest ones would be given a drug so they could sleep under their mother's bed; the bigger ones would fly kites on the roof of the brothels or roam the streets late into the night until the men had left.



This twelve-year-old boy has rigged up a ball on a string so he can practice cricket. The older children of the red-light district are often sent to buy drugs or alcohol for their mother's customers.



When red-light district women are with customers, small children like this little girl are given a drug so they can sleep under their mother's bed.

When I returned home to the United States, I fell into a despair unlike anything I'd ever felt before—something I now understand was a delayed reaction to the suffering I'd witnessed. Moreover, I felt inadequate to the task of doing justice to the stories the women had entrusted to me. After more than two months of pure hopelessness, I wrote a tiny fragment of the story, then another. Eventually those vignettes formed the basis

for *Sold*, a story told in fragments because it portrays what is a fragmented—if not shattering—experience.

My heart fills with outrage and sadness when I think of what I saw in Calcutta. I still get choked up when I look at my notes or my pictures from Nepal. And I have a feeling I can only describe as homesickness when I think of that amazing afternoon when I was dancing in square of the little village at the foot of the Himalayas.

But when I think of the young women who shared their stories with me, what I feel is urgency—urgency that their experiences be known and understood by the outside world.

With gratitude,
Patricia McCormick

Every day young girls are bought and sold around the world



This row of brothel rooms is hidden within the dark alleys of Calcutta.

The Facts about Human Trafficking:

- The United Nations estimates that between 2 and 4 million people are trafficked worldwide every year.
- Human trafficking is a global epidemic. According to the U.S. government, up to 800,000 people (mostly women and children) are abducted or lured from their homes and families and trafficked across borders, including those of the the United States, each year.
- Cambodia is reported to be Asia's sex trafficking capital.
- The U.S. government studies show that trafficking is currently estimated to be a \$9.5 billion industry—yet remains one of the biggest human rights challenges of our time.
- The U.S. is one of the top destinations for sex traffickers. Trafficking rings have become skilled at infiltrating suburban communities. Reports show that high rates of trafficking occur in California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Texas, and Washington. In fact, one of the largest trafficking operations is based in San Diego.
- Colorado state lawmakers recently passed a bill to make human smuggling a felony as the state has become a crossroads for illegal immigration trafficking.
- According to the FBI, girls are routinely trafficked into towns hosting major sporting events such as the Olympics, the Super Bowl, and the World Series.

- An ABC News report states that federal law ensures that American sex tourists landing on foreign soil and hiring underage prostitutes can get 30 years in prison. But in the state of Georgia, punishment for soliciting sex with an underage girl is only 5 to 20 years.
- Reports show that the human trafficking is the third-largest crime scheme after drug and weapons trafficking, and the second most profitable after drug trafficking.
- In January 2006, President Bush signed the H.R. 972, Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, a bill designed to provide new grants to state and local law enforcement and to help create important new services and provide access to residential treatment facilities to help victims get a chance at a better life.



A young Nepalese girl feeds her goats before leaving for school.



A destitute Calcutta red-light woman.

Media Coverage of Human Trafficking in the U.S.:

The child sex trade is a highly organized syndicate that rivals the drug trade in profitability. The industry has formed a pipeline, which starts in the villages of Nepal and feeds a continuous supply of girls to the urban brothels. Recruiters capture them, smugglers transport them, brothel owners enslave them, corrupt police betray them and men rape and infect them. Every person in the chain profits except for the girls, who pay the price with their lives: 80% become infected with HIV.

—From “The Day My God Died”, PBS,
Independent Lens documentary

Recent coverage includes:

- *People*, “Nightmare at the Truck Stop” — May 1, 2006
- *Marie Claire*, “This Woman Was Forced into Slavery in the U.S.” (exclusive report) — May 2006 issue
- *Good Morning America*, “Former Child Prostitute Finds New Hope” (feature story) — April 11, 2006
- ABC News report, “Sex Tourism Thriving in the Bible Belt” — April 4, 2006
- *PrimeTime Live*, “Sex Trafficking in America” (feature story) — February 9, 2006
- *PBS Frontline*, “Sex Slaves,” documentary — February 7, 2006
- *The New York Times*, “In Disgrace and Facing Death” — March 28, 2006

- *The New York Times*, “Fighter for Nepali Girls Rejoins Mother” — January 26, 2006
- *The New York Times*, “Hitting Brothel Owners Where it Hurts” — January 24, 2006
- *Born Into Brothels*, 2006 Academy Award–winning documentary
- *Lifetime* Movie Network, “Human Trafficking,” (world premiere mini-series) — November 2005

Did you know? If you Google the term “human trafficking,” results will render over 4.1 million entries.



A typical Nepali mountain home, with a tiny shrine set up outside the front door for offerings of marigold petals and bits of rice for the Hindu gods.

Patricia McCormick is an award-winning journalist who has written for *The New York Times*, *Reader's Digest*, and *Parents* magazine. Her first young adult novel was the national best-seller *Cut*, which was chosen as an ALA Best Book of the Year. She also wrote *My Brother's Keeper*, a Bank Street Best Book of the Year selection. McCormick holds a master's degree from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism as well as a master's degree in creative writing from the New School. Since completing her studies in creative writing, McCormick has dedicated her time exclusively to writing young adult fiction.

In 2004 she was named a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow, an award which she used, in part, to underwrite a trip to Nepal and India to research her latest book, *SOLD*. McCormick lives in New York City with her husband and two children.



Praise from Patricia McCormick's fans:

“Ms. McCormick, I just finished reading *Cut* and I am still recovering. My face is wet and my eyes sting. It really touched me. I am a 13-year-old girl who suffered with the same exact thing Callie went through—“cutting.” **Your book made me cry, but from a feeling of comfort**—suddenly seeing what I went through written on paper, and knowing that I’m not alone. It is a very good book. Thank you for writing it.”

—*Stacy*

“Sadly I began cutting a while ago. I have many scars . . . but your book is so wonderful! I read it in one sitting and it helped me so much I cried and laughed, but mostly cried because I realized I needed help. **Your book *Cut* helped push me to tell my mother I needed help!** Thank you.”

—*Ann*

“**Your book has made me change so much.** It’s unexplainable how many things I’ve stopped doing, started doing . . . and I just feel like I’m living a different life right now. Which is good. I look at life with a new perspective. I loved your book [*Cut*], and I’m going to have to purchase your new one [*My Brother’s Keeper*]. I’m glad you’re such a fantastic writer and keep the books coming . . . but especially keep on being happy. This is what I’ve learned from you . . . Thanks.”

—*Christopher*

“**This was seriously the best book I have ever read in my life.** I didn’t want it to end. So many people at my school think that drinking and doing drugs is what you have to do to be cool, and it’s not. Our school does a drug awareness program and we make posters and watch films and we talk about not doing drugs for days. But no one listens. If they made everyone read *My Brother’s Keeper* I bet that would help. You’re a great author and I hope you continue to write great books.”

—*Shelby*

“I’m 13, and when I read *My Brother’s Keeper* I felt like you knew what I’m going through. In school we’re always talking about making good choices and I guess my brother missed that part of class because all he does is smoke pot and sleep. **My parents are clueless—and it makes me mad.** How do you not know something is wrong when your kid is spaced out all of the time? I’m glad you wrote this book because it helps to know that other people are probably going through this exact same thing. I’d give it to my brother to read but I’m pretty sure he doesn’t remember how.”

—*Daniel*

“I just read *My Brother’s Keeper*. As an eighth-grade teacher I feel that you give an important message—covering up someone’s problem enables the problem to grow. **So many of the students in my school would benefit from reading *Keeper***—I’ll be certain to recommend this book to my students. Thank you for a well told lesson.”

—*Jessica*