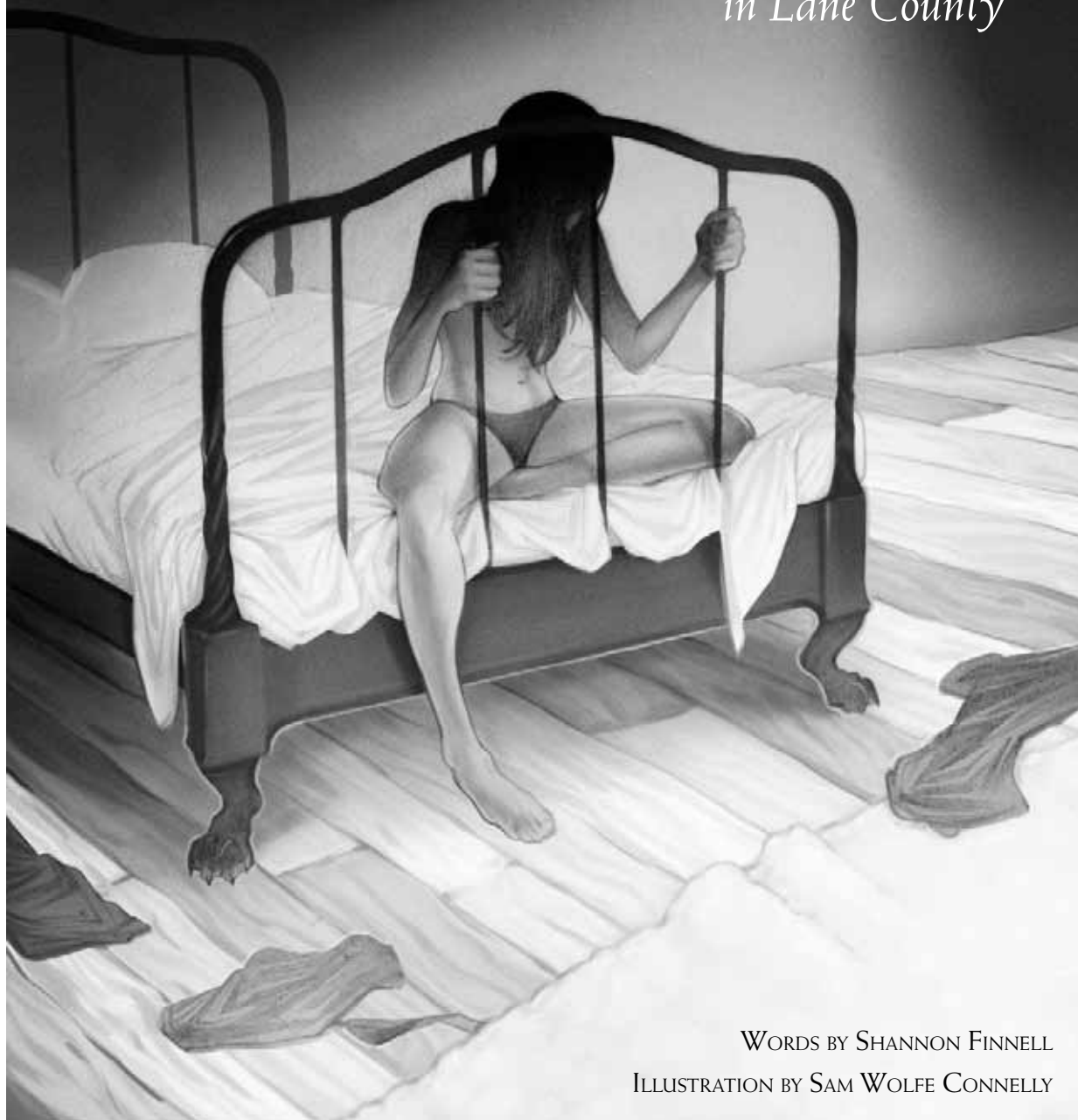


People for Sale

*Sex trafficking hits home
in Lane County*



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In sleepy little Eugene, some 90 miles south of the maligned “Pornland” and far from the populous cities of San Francisco and L.A., there would seem to be nothing for sex traffickers to prey on: no destitute starlets, no major international port, no out-of-control crime wave to hide behind. But local treatment facilities, women’s advocates and law enforcement say Eugene is no stranger to sex trafficking, and it’s not just that trafficking passes through rural Oregon on I-5. Lane County is a recruitment ground and a market for sex traffickers.

“Most of the chronically homeless youth that we see have come against it — they’ve been solicited to be involved or have been involved,” says Liz Schwarz, director of homeless and runaway youth services at Looking Glass Youth & Family Services. Schwarz says that the vulnerability of homeless youth makes them ideal targets for pimps or gang members who traffic people for sex.

The city of Eugene reported that in 2008-2009, Looking Glass served 1,945 runaway or homeless youth. Schwarz estimates that they’re now seeing about 150 chronically homeless youth (“a super ballpark figure,” she says), and she isn’t sure about the solicitation rate of youth that are homeless but not classified as chronically so.

Organizations such as the Zonta Club of Eugene, which advocates for the condition of women and girls worldwide, try to bring local attention to sex trafficking issues. Zontian Liz Ness says that a lot of people don’t even understand what trafficking is. “The definition of trafficking is NOT moving a person,” she says. “You don’t have to move a person to traffic. It’s having someone do something they really aren’t wanting to do.”

That extends to forced labor, which is estimated to be the largest component of human trafficking, and sexual exploitation through physical force, threats of violence or manipulated drug addiction. Sex trafficking also includes situations in which people who are trafficked are promised money in exchange for performing sex acts and never receive it.

Lane County District Attorney Alex Gardner says that some traffickers make it a priority to take a victim’s cell phone, download the numbers and memorize other personal information. Then the traffickers taunt and physically threaten not only their victims, but their victims’ families and friends. Gardner gives the example: “They say, ‘I’ll rape your little brother.’”

Ness says that even when compared to survivors of other abuses or mental illness that are often difficult to acknowledge, people who have been trafficked for sex have a tough time coming forward. “It’s so hard to get a trafficking victim to speak. You can have someone be abused, raped, drug addicted, and the difference with trafficking is that these girls feel such overwhelming shame — which is so sad because it’s not their fault.”

While those being trafficked are trapped in a world of abuse and survival, Ness says that traffickers tend to have violent but business-like mindsets about sex trafficking. “It’s the one thing in which you have a renewable resource,” Ness says, “and the biggest market is for under-age girls.”

“We’ve got to stop tolerating sex trafficking and treating it as if it’s just a victimless crime, because it’s not,” says U.S. Attorney Dwight Holton. “The *Pretty Woman* image is not the real world, in my experience.”

According to Holton and Assistant U.S. Attorney Kemp Strickland, they prosecuted a case in June that contains elements more typical of the real world:

A.K., a troubled 14-year-old girl, was targeted by 36-year-old James A. Jackson in Seattle. Ideal prey because of her problems, she was soon groomed by Jackson for forced prostitution. He brought her to Portland, where he beat her, choked her and forced her to have sex for money.

Jackson tried to make her easier to control by addicting her to cocaine, forcing her to use and telling her about his abuse of the last girl who refused, but A.K. told the court that addiction never really took. She still has a physical scar from an instance when Jackson tried to bite off her finger. Eventually, when A.K. was certain Jackson was about to kill her, she promised to cooperate and earn \$20,000 for him if he allowed her to live.