Episode 15 – Life Recaptured – An escape for a victim of sex trafficking

Today’s episode focuses on human trafficking and features 2 special guests; Brandy who is the President of Life Recaptured and Brooke who is a survivor of human trafficking.

I Need Blue episodes contain content which may be sensitive or triggering to some. If you need help, please seek it. All previous episodes can be found on my website, [www.ineedblue.net](http://www.ineedblue.net).

Let’s begin…

Jen

Good morning, Brady, can you tell us about Life Recaptured?

Brandy

My little sister became a victim of human trafficking. At the time, I didn’t know anything about human trafficking. I assumed it was overseas or in another state. I had no idea it would happen in my own backyard.

My sister is deceased. I was very hurt and angry when I heard what human trafficking was about. I did not understand how someone, whom I’d known for years, would be capable of selling someone that you love.

For me, this started in my heart. I began to pray. As I did, my husband and I felt called to this ministry to help rescue human trafficking victims. We went for training, because if you do not know how this works, you could hurt the girls instead of helping them.

We reached out to a group called Project Rescue who have a 92% success rate in rescuing victims. www.projectrescue.com

I'm excited to share, we have our first safe house right here in Brevard County. There aren’t any other safe homes for traffic victims.

Brooke has brought inspiration into my life as we were able to reach out and help her. I'm excited for you to hear her story about what God and Life Recaptured has done for her.

Brooke

I met Miss Brandy about five years ago. At that time, I was working the streets in Cocoa. For over 20 years I had been trafficked, and I battled addiction.

I wanted to get better. I wanted to heal and walk away from it. I wanted to be a new person with a new life. I have children and I needed to get my act together for them.

I decided to ask Jesus for help. I'd never done that before and mentored. Shortly after, I met Miss Brandy. I began going to church and she began instructing me in the Word of God, teaching me how to heal; how to pray. She started believing in me and encouraging me. She shared her heart with me about this ministry. While we were working together, we grew very close, and I knew that she really wanted to help me.

Through healing, I feel like the bad stuff never happened to me. I am working on getting my driver's license, furthering my education, I work, and my children are back in my life. Most importantly, I'm not who I was. I don't recognize her anymore. I don't identify with her. I feel empowered, I feel equipped, and I feel honored to be able to give back.

 I'll be hands of hope to reach out to these ladies and let them know it is never too late. You can heal from your past, you can salvage your life, you can be redeemed, you can be restored, and you can achieve great things. I am grateful to God and Life Recaptured. What would have happened to me if I had not been found? If I had not received help? I assure you; my story wouldn't have had a happy ending. I wouldn't have ended up with a new life, new hope, and this wonderful thing I’m a part of. It's an honor and I really appreciate you having me and listening. Thank you.

Jen

I have a huge smile on my face from feeling your energy and hearing your words. I'm happy to hear about where you are today. Your spirit sounds very strong. I am glad you connected with Brandy. I think we're all given a purpose on this earth. Not everybody can find it. So, when you can, and when you're able to do the work associated with it, it's such a beautiful, rewarding thing.

Brandy

Yes, I agree.

We don't go into her or any victim’s particular story, however, I can share some of the warnings signs to look for:

* Someone who is younger and with an older gentleman where it appears they’re not allowed to hold their head up, to speak, or someone always speaks for them.
* They may look undernourished, while the person with them looks healthy.
* If that person goes somewhere where you're asking them questions, and yet the adult with them answers every question that also is a sign.
* An appearance of low self-esteem where they're not allowed to have their own identity,

they've been pushed down so far and feel they don't even know who they are themselves.

Those are signs which we look for. There is a National hotline number available to call:

888-373-7888.

Brook has overcome so many obstacles. This trafficking was 20 years of her life.

Jen

Brandi, how do people recruit their victims?

Brandy

The use of cell phones and apps have made more people accessible. There are apps specifically geared toward young people. The trafficker can befriend them, communicate with them, and win their trust. It may happen over a period of say eight months to a year, however long it takes to build the trust. They prey on girls who exhibit low self-esteem and needs attention. They need a friend. After they befriend them, gain trust, then they will meet.

Next the girls have become victims and are on the missing list. It doesn’t happen like you see on the TV or movies. Human trafficking can happen from within their own family, either a mother or a father will traffic them. Some have been sold at the age of 3 or 4, by their mothers or their fathers. This can persist for up to 12 to 15 years before these young ladies can escape.

And then somewhere down the road, they've met someone that knows that they have a problem more now than, than it used to be.

Now we are more aware of the signs. We can communicate better. We can find out if they've been trafficked and we have our survivors talk to certain girls who have been picked up by the authority or by policemen.

A lot of times they are mistaken as prostitutes and that they choose to be on the streets. That is not always the case. After being trafficked for so long, they feel they're worn out, they're not going to make the money like they used to, so they get put on the street. The trafficker manipulates the girls and tells them, “I love you. I'm giving you your freedom.”

 work experience, some of these things where she was put back on the street again. And when they're out on the street, and they're working, they feel at that point they they have no way to survive, but to service clients for sex, but they've been held against their will.

Once apprehended, they go before the judges. The judge likely thinks, “well, here you are, again, I know I'm going to see you probably five more times this year.” We are working to implement a program with the judges which allow us to come in and provide training to them on which signs to look for. If they feel they've been trafficked, they will call us and someone like Brooke, who's a survivor, will be allowed to talk to them. She will know within minutes if she's been trafficked. At that point, they will ask her, do you want to go to jail? Or do you want to go to Life Recaptured? We're here to help them. We're not a rehab. We want to be with them for life. We want to let them know we're family. There is a lot involved in their healing. There's medical, psychological, spiritual, and just being with them to teach them life skills. They haven't had a chance to learn any skills. They don't even know who they are.

Jen

If we see someone whom we suspect may be a victim of human trafficking, what should we do?

Brandy

There are a few options. Call the Sheriff's department. We work closely with Sheriff Ivey. He always tells us not to be afraid to call. We would rather check out the information and find out if she is being trafficked, and if so, we can get her help. Second, you can call the hotline, which is 888-373-7888.

We do not encourage you make contact with them. The trafficker could get angry that you approach them. She will receive a beating for that. It’s best you observe and if you feel there are some signs, either call Sheriff Ivy's office, or call the hotline. National hotline is 1-888-373-7888.

Jen

Perfect. What do you suggest people do, who are not fortunate enough to have a facility like Life Recaptured in their communities?

Brandy

We have partners throughout the U.S. and the world. If we receive calls, we investigate, and we hook up with our partners. We don't leave them standing there. Even though Life Recaptured is for young women, there are male victims too. We can help them find the resources as well.

Jen

That's great. Are you comfortable talking about your sister?

Brandi

We don’t share details about any sexually trafficked victim. What I will say is the following: we had no idea this person would ever do something like sell her, but it can happen with people you associate with. There's not a certain look associated with the perpetrator. A lot of people think it's like the movies and either the girls are in cages, or the guy looks like a pimp. It's not. It can be a teacher, it can be a coach, it can be in your church, it's everywhere. It's a $150 billion dollar business and Florida is number 3 in the nation. Brevard County is a hot spot.

Let’s talk about the apps which are geared toward children. The app can play cartoons. When the parent looks at the phone, they think it is harmless. It’s ordinary cartoons. The moment the child gets on the app to watch a cartoon, a trafficker can track them to their front door. They watch everything that's going on in the household. For 3 to 6 weeks, they learn the routines, they know when the father goes to work, when the mother comes home, if the child goes out to the mailbox etc. At the point when the child is taken, it is assumed to be a missing child when in fact, the child was taken to be trafficked. Be careful with your apps. We offer a list of those apps that you should be aware of. If you call me at 321-652-3135, we can get that information out to you. Share it with parents and anyone where kids are involved.

Jen

I never would have thought to be aware of such things. It’s much harder to be a parent nowadays. Our children are exposed to so many things and in ways which we would never have guessed. We watch a cartoon not realizing someone is watching our child. Thank you for sharing that information.

Can you share examples of the trauma someone goes through as the heal from being a victim to becoming a survivor?

Brandy

They all have trigger points. Brook has dealt with many of her trigger points. We find victims might see something or smell something which can put them back to the situation where she feels like “it’s starting all over again.” Traffic victims trust no one. They don't want to hear you say “God” because where was God, when they were calling out to him when they felt like they were dying. As you go along, you work to win their trust. As you begin to talk about self-esteem, they begin to understand they have an identity which they were not aware of.

They have many physical problems. If you've been made to service up to 30 men a day, then you're going to have health problems. You may have a hard time controlling your kidneys, it may be that you have a hard time sitting or lying. STD’s are common. There's so much abuse but mental abuse is the worst.

Some girls are left never being able to have babies. This is very graphic, but many of them have been sodomized. There are several dental problems from what they've been forced to do. This is more than people could ever understand. It’s an overall attack on their mental, physical, and their psyche. We have known girls who have come out of the program; they feel strong and their doing well. Then a trigger happens and sometimes it leads to their suicide. The suicide rate is high in traffic victims.

I would like to share good news. We have watched girls who have been held for over 17 years and thought they could never integrate back into society. Now they are authors, one girl became a psychologist, another girl became a worship leader, another girl has become a nurse.

Jen

How does someone create trust with someone who has been trafficked?

Brook

Consistency, positive reinforcement, encouragement, and just love them. There are barriers which must be broken. There are wounds which must be healed, and it takes different people different rates to be able to heal and trust. I know at one point; I didn't trust anybody. I didn't want you to hug me. I didn't want you to talk to me. I didn't even want you near me. I began to see that people really cared about me. It made a world of difference. Now I'm able to have relationships with people that I never thought imaginable. It is incredible just to be able to love and be loved. It's amazing.

Jen

That is so wonderful. You make me smile every time you talk.

How do you help someone who is afraid to take the first step of coming to Life Recaptured? What would you tell them about your experience and how amazing and helpful it has been to you?

Brook

I'll share my heart. They'll be able to see it's real by the way I carry myself, how I interact with them. They can see I am real and I’m transparent.

Brandy

Brooke inspires me every day to go forward. Several times it becomes discouraging. You may work with girls who you thought were going to be victorious, but then a trigger hits and they regress.

Brooke has a giant smile and she's beautiful. On the inside and outside. God has restored her beauty from ashes to beauty. She looks in the mirror now and feels beautiful.

Brooke

Absolutely. I believe I'm beautiful. I love myself. I have confidence. My self-esteem has just soared. Seeing myself in a beautiful way, has been one of the biggest obstacles which I have faced my entire life.

Jen

You have a boutique which accepts clothing and home goods. Can you tell us about the boutique.

Brandy

When we first started trying to get the safe house, the pandemic hit. I remember doing a lot of praying about a location, how to pay for it etc. My family had the old packing house and an orange grove. My family allowed me to have the building to establish the boutique. It was an overwhelming task, but people started coming and helping us. One by one, we were able to transform that old packing house into the boutique. We have volunteers who help and my manager Dorothy is just an angel from God. She quit her job and came to help us. She has made the boutique so beautiful.

Jen

Yes! It's way more than I expected. It's set up like a home. You walk through and there are different areas, home furniture and goods, jewelry, clothing, shoes, and confectionaries. It's very cozy, very welcoming.

Brandy

It helps us sustain our home. All the monies help cover the utility expenses for the homes. We have our own honey from our bees, and we have citrus that will be coming in from our orange groves. There are candies. Everything is given; not consigned. We ask for the best because we don't want it to look like a thrift store. We want people to understand these girls deserve the best, not secondhand stuff. The best of their life has been stolen for them.

We have prayed and had different groups, especially the Georgiana church that came in and helped us to decorate the safe houses. They were beautiful. We can't share where it is, but I can tell you this when: when the girls arrive, they feel like “this is my home and I’m proud of it.” We try to make everything beautiful, so they feel beautiful and know that God created them with a purpose.

Jen

Can you describe the process when someone arrives at the home?

Brandy

First, they go into what's called an assessment home. Once there, we evaluate where they are, psychologically, physically and every way. Generally, they are there about 9 to 10 weeks as they heal. They come in exhausted. They haven't eaten properly, they haven't slept. They have a schedule. They have a time they wake up and a bedtime. When you are trafficked, you are up all night. We provide them a schedule to ensure proper healing but also a sense of what normalcy should be like. Hour by hour different life skills are worked on. They can do art or plant some seeds. They love to watch their plants grow. It reminds them that they're growing too. We have gifted women come in. They want to learn to play the piano, for example.

We're not going to make this a home where you sit and do nothing. This home is to help them to grow back into who they should be, who God's called them to be, who they really are. We cook dinner and we always eat together. We have themed dinners. We have therapy, we have group therapy, we have one on one meetings with them. Each day we track how they are doing; how they are growing.

Jen

Thank you for sharing. Taking the first step can be really, scary. The more we reassure others of this environment, they more welcome they will feel. You're walking into a safe environment, it's engaging, and there are things for you to do.

Brandy

They go into a second home, and then a third home. The second home is residential. There is education, more freedom with your advocates to go to the library and to different places. As you grow, within the community. We have about 100 businesses who are working with us. They have the understanding that if the girl starts to work, and there's a trigger point, she is allowed to walk out the door. This is allowed 3 times. After three times, we realize she's not able to integrate into society, and we bring her back with no criticism. We just love on her and recognize they are not ready yet. It’s ok.

At the point where they can grow, they are taught their finances, how to dress, how to go out and get a job; we teach them life skills. And when they follow that they go into what's called empowerment. It is a 4-bedroom place with other girls and advocates. They have more freedom and can use their phones at that point.

The next step is they go into what's called independent living. They pay a price to live there, but all the monies go into an account for them. They can stay there up to a year and a half where all the money is saved, and then we go out and help them to find their own place. They have some money to start off with education. They have someone who is with them all the time. A mentor who they can call at any time. Everyone is assigned a mentor. We don't leave them; we invite them back. We have barbecues and reunion days. We're their family and we love them. We want to always be there for them.

Jen

What age range is allowed?

Brandy

We take them at 18. We are not allowed to take anyone under 18. The state comes in and they work with the younger ones. We have partners within the state who we use as resources. The people we take in are those who were taken at a very early age and escaped, or we found them through the court system, or their family members have called for help.

We have military retirees that have started our rescue team.

Jen

Be aware. This is happening everywhere. It could be something as near and dear as your neighbor or a family member. It's important we are aware of our surroundings, the people, and anything which makes your instincts not feel right.

Brandy

We have training sessions for our community. To get further information call: 321-652-3135 or visit liferecaptured.org.

Jen

Brandy and Brook, I know your story, your energy and your faith in God is going to resonate with so many listeners. You've provided such great resource information.

Brandy

Jen, I would just like to say thank you, for you. You inspired me by reading your story. I love that people want to help and the only thing I can say is this: we are not a one-man band. We believe in bringing in people's ideas, and your help, in any way, can help us. Without the community, there's no way we can keep going forward to stop sexual slavery.

I'd like to appeal to everyone's heart. As someone who's been through it in my own backyard, please get involved and help us. There’s more going on then you realize when it comes to rescuing human trafficked victims.

Jen

Absolutely. Please visit the boutique, donate any great items which match the items they are looking for. Visit their website to make financial donations. [www.liferecaptured.org](http://www.liferecaptured.org)

Be aware and report if you see something suspicious.