

ONE

THAILAND

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SIXTY FEET. Only sixty feet.

The memory is a blur really. There were people scurrying around, intensely heading somewhere along with the commotion of motorcycle carts and vendors and lots of bronze and gold Buddha statues everywhere. I was only about ten years old and on vacation with my family in Thailand. My dad is a career military man in the United States Air Force, a bombardier. When I was in the second grade he was transferred to Guam, so my family traveled all over Asia when I was a kid.

True to my adventurous self, I had run ahead of my dad. I wasn't too far ahead, about the distance from the pitcher's mound to home plate. It must have appeared that I was wandering alone in the bustling city as I passed what I later found out was a strip club, a sex shop catering mostly to Westerners who came to Thailand to act out their perversions. Suddenly, out of nowhere a man grabbed my arm and began pulling me into the building. I tried to resist as he insisted there was something inside he wanted me to see. The man didn't see my dad—he just saw me, a tanned towhead.

My dad quickly came to my rescue. Fortunately, his eyes had been fixed on me as I ventured ahead. He separated me from the stranger and pushed the man away with what must have been a superhuman surge of adrenaline. I was surprised by the way my dad was yelling at him, creating quite a ruckus—kind of like a pro wrestler

threatening his opponent. Except this wasn't an act. At the time, I thought dad was overreacting to the idea of my talking to strangers. Almost as soon as it started, it was over. And I didn't think anything more about that incident until twenty years later.

A couple of weeks after signing with the San Francisco Giants, my whole world changed. I had just seen a headline about human trafficking in the newspaper. My friend Mike was at my house, and I asked him what he knew about trafficking.

I really didn't think it was that big of an issue. I was completely oblivious. Mike said that I should get in touch with Dave Batstone and learn more about his group, Not for Sale.

So I googled it.

Not for Sale is an organization that educates, equips, and mobilizes activists to “deploy innovative solutions to re-abolish slavery in their own backyards and across the globe.”

On the Not for Sale web site I started reading about modern-day slavery and the horrors of human trafficking. Suddenly as I was reading these stories, my wife, Larisa, exclaimed, “Dave Batstone is in Half Moon Bay!” I couldn't believe it. When she said he was a professor at the University of San Francisco, I knew I had to get in touch with him.

I searched for an e-mail address online and sent him a message, although I didn't think it was conceivable that it would reach him. In the message I told him who I was, a pitcher for the San Francisco Giants, and that I was very interested in his organization and would like to learn more about what Not for Sale was doing.

Dave Batstone is a fan of the Giants. When he first read the message, he was convinced that someone from within his organization was pranking him. But when no one would admit to sending him the e-mail, he replied to me within an hour.

Larisa and I were going to San Francisco for FanFest, so we were able to arrange a dinner with Dave and his wife. His passion was contagious. The more we talked, the more I felt compelled to join him in Not for Sale's mission.

Did you know that sixty percent of men who fly into Thailand are there on sex tourism trips? They have intentionally purchased a package so they can have illegal sex with a young girl, a child—a kid—and they pay top dollar for it. Girls who should be playing with dolls and coloring books are forced to have sex with a dozen men or more *every day*. The slavery industry as a whole, from child soldiers and children picking cocoa beans to bonded laborers and sweatshop workers and sex slaves, generates more than thirty-two billion dollars every year.

Worldwide, more than thirty million people are trapped in lives bound by slavery.

The odds are good that there's a slave near you. Yes, even right in the USA.

And then it clicked.

I remember looking at Larisa and saying, "Honey, I think I was going to be turned into a slave." I was just a kid, and it was obvious that I was white, even though I was pretty tan. I spent every day outside playing baseball, and the sun had bleached my hair blonde. People would pay good money to have sex with a blonde boy.

What would have happened if my dad had been looking the other way? But he wasn't, and my dad saved me.

Today dads in Thailand who are desperate to survive are selling off their kids as sex slaves. Some have been promised that their child will receive an education and employment in another country. Some simply cannot find any alternative means to make ends meet.

Can you imagine how that child feels?

Children don't have any control over the situation. They are helpless and hopeless. And they are face to face with evil incarnate, a hellacious and disgusting scenario that will haunt them for the rest of their lives.

After visiting with Dave, I knew I had to do something. I had to get involved. To remain uninvolved wasn't even an option. I pledged one hundred dollars for every strikeout for the remainder of the season. The money helped build a hospital in Thailand for girls rescued from sex slavery.



It took twenty years for God to prepare my heart and to break me and draw me close to His mission in the world, to cause me to want to live out my faith in such a way that the love and servant leadership of Jesus would be transparent in everything I did.

In the movie *The Chronicles of Narnia: Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the valiant mouse Reepicheep consoles Eustace, the boy-turned-dragon, with these words:

You know, extraordinary things only happen to extraordinary people. Maybe it's a sign that you've got an extraordinary destiny. Something greater than you could have imagined.

My extraordinary, near-impossible journey to the major leagues, and to hear God's call on my life, started with Dad.