



From the Director

by Ann Dugger

Human Trafficking in Jacksonville

As Mother's Day approaches, memories of my precious "Moner" keep coming to mind. I think how much I've missed her in the year since she died, and I appreciate anew how wisely she trained us kids and ensured our safety. Of course, when I was young, children didn't face the threat of danger as much as they do today, but the possibility of harm was still there. Moner (and my dad) made sure someone watched out for us if they had to leave, and when we were older, Moner gave us enough chores to keep us busy until she returned.

Another concern of today's parents that my mother didn't have to worry about was the cell phone and all of its possibilities and enticements. Be sure to read the lead story by our VA editor Shirley Shaw where she tells how easily text messages between our children can actually lead to their being labeled sex offenders.

This entire issue of the *Victims' Advocate* is designed to make parents aware of the

many dangers facing our boys and girls, teens and younger, in every aspect of their lives. I can't urge you enough as parents to know what is going on in your child's life.

I had the opportunity a few weeks ago to hear Crystal Freed, co-chair of the NE Florida Human Trafficking Task Force, give a startling presentation about the sex trade in this nation and how much it involves our children.

She cited the following alarming facts:

1. Conservative estimates by UNICEF tell us that at least 2.5 million children are sexually exploited each year;
2. There are 27 million slaves around the world today - more than ever before in our history;
3. In the United States, up to 50,000 people are trafficked, 80 percent of whom are women and children; and
4. Florida is third in the nation, behind New York and California in human trafficking.

Crystal said, "I got involved [with the HT Task Force] when I realized that kids as young as my children, the youngest of which is 5 years old, are trafficked daily, and bought and sold as a

commodity. It costs a mere \$20 to buy 15 minutes of a child's innocence."

It's hard for us to imagine that our children are in danger or vulnerable to this sort of activity, but Crystal said, "In October 2008 there was a nationwide sweep to rescue 48 teenagers (so-called throw away kids) as young as 13 years old from illegal sex trade, and Jacksonville was among 27 areas in which operations were held. Minors were trafficked from Virginia to Jacksonville and sold as sex

slaves."

This case came to law enforcement attention when "a security guard noticed men going in and out of a hotel room. The girls would stay in reputable hotel chains where you might want to stay on a family vacation."

Crystal urged us as parents, as citizens, to be aware, to take a stand in determining when something "just does not smell right. Victims can be seen in the community, walking children to school, going to worship, working in

public, working in restaurants, nail salons, even living next door...Every day people are trafficked, and every day people are the traffickers. So, like that security guard who alerted JSO, be aware and trust your gut."

Watch over your children, ever so carefully. On this Mother's Day let's thank God for the precious gift of our children and seek His wisdom in training them "in the way they should go."

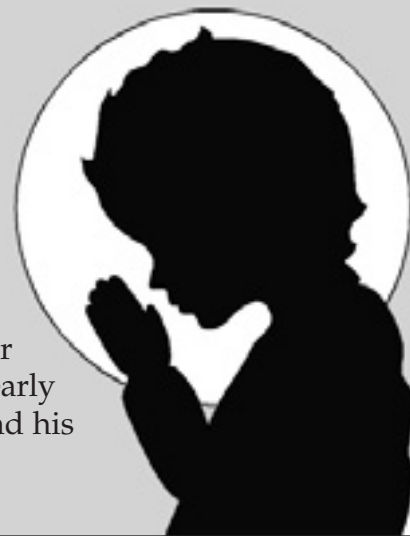
Hannah wanted a child but couldn't conceive, so she prayed, "O LORD of hosts, if thou will look on my affliction [barrenness], and remember me...and will give me a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life..." and the LORD remembered her.

She had a son and called his name Samuel, saying, "For this child I prayed, and the LORD hath given me my petition. Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he shall be lent to the LORD."

Samuel ministered before the LORD as a child... moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice." And [the priest] Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife because she dedicated her son to the LORD.

- I Samuel 1, 2

Inspirational Thought



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