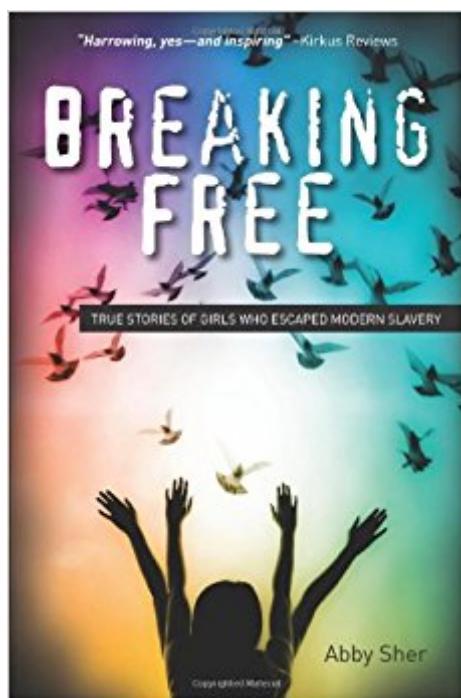


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# Breaking Free: True Stories Of Girls Who Escaped Modern Slavery



## Synopsis

Breaking Free: True Stories of Girls Who Escaped Modern Slavery, by award-winning author Abby Sher, explores the global issue of human sex trafficking from a survivor's point of view. It recounts the harrowing stories of three courageous women—Somaly Mam, Minh Dang, and Maria Suarez—each of whom were all forced into sexual slavery as children. After escaping their captors, these three women could easily have become voiceless victims, lost to the horrors of their own histories; instead, they have each become leading advocates and activists in the anti-trafficking movement. With help from Somaly, Maria, Minh, and many other survivors and counselors, Sher tells the riveting story of what it means to be liberated from sexual trafficking and find the trust and conviction to help educate new survivors. Told with breath-taking honesty and simplicity, *Breaking Free: True Stories of Girls Who Escaped Modern Slavery* sends the message that, even in the most tragic circumstances, the unwavering hope and compassion of the human spirit can and will shine through.

**A Note from the Author and Publisher of *Breaking Free*:** June 3, 2014

Dear Readers, Students, and Educators:

*Breaking Free: True Stories of Girls Who Escaped Modern Slavery* recounts the harrowing stories of three women—Somaly Mam, Minh Dang, and Maria Suarez—each of whom have become leading advocates and activists in the anti-trafficking movement. Within a few weeks of the book's release, *Newsweek Magazine* published an article (May 30th, 2014 issue) reporting that Somaly Mam had fabricated and embellished her life story. As a result, Somaly Mam has resigned as president of her Foundation. To say the least, this news came as a complete surprise to us. These accusations are extremely disturbing and disappointing, and we sincerely apologize for any alleged fictitious content in our book regarding Somaly's story. Nonetheless, we continue to believe that the work of Minh, Maria, and other human rights activists and organizations should not be tarnished as a result of these revelations concerning one individual. The work they do to rescue girls who have fallen victim to the scourge of human trafficking can and should be respected, even in light of this recent development.

The author and staff of Barron's Educational Series hope that you still find this book to be an informative and thought-provoking call-to-action for all those committed to ending human trafficking. Sincerely yours, Abby Sher

The Staff of Barron's Educational Series, Inc.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 8 Up • This moving title explores the world of modern day slavery and sex trafficking through three varied stories of women who were forced into sexual slavery but who escaped and are now working to help others in similar situations. Through straightforward, compassionate prose compiled from interviews with her subjects, Sher shows the amazing strength of Somaly Mam, who was taken from her village in Cambodia as a child and ended up in a brothel in Penh Phnom; Minh Dang, who was raped by her father at age three and then prostituted by her parents at 10; and Maria Suarez, a Mexican immigrant tricked into captivity. Dang's heartbreakingly true story in particular will resonate with readers and remind them how close to home the issue is, as the California teenager lived a double life, attending high school and playing soccer even as she was enduring such violence and abuse. Though these tales are rife with horrors and hardships, each woman's resilience shines through. Before each chapter, Sher includes common misconceptions and real facts about modern-day slavery and sex workers. Back matter includes more information on the topic, such as explanations for why trafficking occurs, a listing of significant moments in the anti-trafficking movement, a list of organizations working against trafficking and abuse, and resources for readers who want to take action. Sher's journalistic narratives will be approachable to struggling readers and serve as an accessible bridge into a subject matter not often discussed. While these emotionally stirring accounts are painful to read at times, Sher manages to avoid sensationalizing her subjects, keeping them human and relatable while appealing to teens' compassion and sense of social justice. • Danielle Jones, Multnomah County Library, OR

• "Sex trafficking, " Sher writes, "is defined as the act of forcing, coercing, or conning someone into performing any sexual act." The three young women whom she profiles in this sometimes clumsily written but always compelling book have defined this more

viscerally with their lives as victims. Proving the problem is international in scope, Sher introduces Somaly Mam, a Cambodian girl who was sold into sexual slavery by a man claiming to be her grandfather. There is also Minh Dang, who grew up in California, where her parents routinely sold her to local brothels. And, finally, there is Maria Suarez, a Mexican immigrant who was held captive and then, to add insult to injury, was incarcerated for a crime she didn't commit. Though occasionally lacking in documentation, their stories are equally harrowing and horrifying but inspiring, as well, for all three, having escaped bondage, have become champions in the antitrafficking movement. Sher sums up the heart of her book in one simple sentence that speaks volumes: "We all deserve to be treated as humans, not as property." The lives of these three brave young women are proof positive of that. Grades 9-12. --Michael Cart

I love this book. It's an amazing read for everyone, but I would especially recommend this for young-adult readers who want to understand how to learn to live well after going through horrible experiences. All of us can relate to these human experiences but this book also reminds us how much we need to love each other.

It was good but not all the book linked into my Kindle. Lost quite a bit of the last of each chapter.

Depressing!

This book tells the heartbreakng stories of three women who escaped sexual slavery and then went on to help others. It tells the stories of Somaly Mam, who was forced into prostitution in Cambodia, Minh Dang, whose parents sexually abused her as a child and then forced her into prostitution in the United States and Maria Suarez who was kidnapped and forced to be a slave to a man in California. There is a chapter at the end of the book that explains sex-trafficking and who it is happening to, where, why and how we can help to break the cycle. The stories are sad and tragic and show how the women involved in sex-trafficking are all victims. I like the Sweedish model of prosecution in which the people who buy sex are punished rather than the people who are being sold. I think that the US and the rest of the world should use this way of prosecuting the real criminals, who are the men, rather than the girls and women who are forced into having sex with men and who did not choose to do it and who usually do not receive any of the money that is paid for the abuse of their bodies.

Breaking Free is so well composed and full of power. Sher brings together three stories of incredible women who have survived unspeakable horrors in a way that is raw, jarring, and eye-opening. What makes this book great, though, is her ability to successfully make us aware of the all-out pervasiveness of trafficking while also providing us with hope through the testimonies of strong women and through practical, informative ways to get involved in ending this practice. As a teacher, I wish I could require all parents (and their children, when they're ready) to read this. I know it's making me hold my daughter a little tighter tonight, and I wish parents would educate themselves as to the dangers around their children. Abby Sher has done an amazing job putting together a valuable resource and an answer to the questions of what trafficking is, how it can happen, and why we can't ignore it.

BREAKING FREE recounts the harrowing journeys of three women who escaped unspeakable abuse as victims of sex trafficking. The first account is of Somaly Mam, a Cambodian woman who was coerced into an abusive marriage at an early age and then sold to a brothel where she suffered years of torment. Next is the story of Minh Dang, who grew up in a suburb of California and was forced by her own parents to work as a prostitute from the age of ten. The third account is of Maria Suarez, an immigrant from Mexico who became trapped as the sexual slave of a man and then wrongfully imprisoned for 20 years, accused of murdering her captor. These three women, like many still ensnared in the sex trafficking industry, faced unimaginable horrors, but the one beautiful thing that unites them is their awe-inspiring ability to rise up and fight for freedom for themselves and other victims. Somaly, Minh and Maria all launched their own foundations and have become leading activists in the fight to end modern slavery. The recollections and feelings they share in this book provide a profound exploration of what it means to be free and how utterly tragic it is when that freedom is taken away. In BREAKING FREE, Abby Sher writes with a raw and honest prose, capturing the agony and hope, the resignation and defiance, felt in turns by each of these three women. Interspersed throughout the narratives are heartbreakingly inspiring quotes from the women reflecting on their experiences and the struggles they continue to face each day. Included in the back matter is a comprehensive look at the sex trafficking industry with resources and suggestions for how people can help end this worldwide form of slavery. This must-read book is a powerful reminder of the value of every single human life. Reviewed by Sabrina Abballe.

This shocking, unflinching and very readable book tells of three women in particular as representative of all the young girls and women sold, beaten or forced into slavery and sexual

abuse today. We read of a girl in Cambodia who was sold over and over to pay other people's debts and who was bought by a Swiss aid worker who frequented her pimp's brothel. That couldn't happen here? A girl in California was abused by her own parents, a seemingly respectable Vietnamese couple, who brought her to a brothel to earn for them every night throughout her school and university days. A legal Mexican immigrant in America was kidnapped then enslaved as a house maid and sexually abused for six years, before her captor was killed by another member of the household who left the girl to take the blame. Jailed for twenty-five years, she was released after twenty. These brave young women have gone on to campaign on behalf of girls like themselves - blogging, speaking at meetings or starting a sewing workshop, school and safe house - and have received international awards. BREAKING FREE shows not only that girls are being enslaved and tortured on a daily basis, but that we can all help to fight this behaviour and support the organisations which campaign for change. Abby Sher repeatedly stresses that all money earned by the girls goes to their abusers and the girls have no choice in the matter. Sweden makes the purchasers of sex the criminals instead of the prostitutes, and Abby Sher says that more governments need to consider this move. I recommend this read.

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