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Week 42: Rescue LIFE

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Keeya Vawar

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison. Sheila Walsh is with me.

SHEILA: Hey, everyone!

RANDY: We have been in this season where we're dealing with Rescue LIFE, where we reach into places and give young girls and boys a hope and a future and get them out of some bad situations.

Well, today you're going to hear from someone who has lived that, unfortunately. She tells her story in a book called *One Thousand Elsewhere*, and her name is Keeya Vawar. I got to talk to her recently on *LIFE TODAY LIVE* on my internet program. I just said to the team, I was like, we need our broadcast audience to hear Keeya's story. So Keeya, it is wonderful to have you here.

KEEYA: It's great to be here, thank you!

SHEILA: One of the things that, um, reading your book, Keeya, one of the things that I first impression was left with was how little I understand about the whole process. Randy and I both spent time in Southeast Asia with trafficking there. But realizing the way it happens in America all the time was an eye-opener to me. Can you give us a little of your story as to how you ended up in that situation?

KEEYA: Absolutely. Basically, this was the early '90s. And just a little bit of background, my father was in the United States Air Force. Right now we know that he

was suffering from posttraumatic stress and his way of coping was drugs, in order to kind of medicate what he was going through. And so where that left me and my brother, I have a brother who is five years my senior, and where that left us was just caught in the crossfire of his mental instability. And so another thing that kind of colored the stage for my life was the fact that he abused my mom. It was a domestic violence home life situation. I believe that the drugs and alcohol just kind of exacerbated a lot of what was going on with him.

But by the time, the early '90s hit we were in Dallas, Texas, and so things were not well at home. We were a church family, we were always in church. Grew up on T.B.N. And so we were plugged into a church yet experiencing such a double life of abuse and uncertainty. So that's basically, I guess where my story unfolded where I struck out on my own at about 16 years of age.

RANDY: Yeah, tell us about that because I think that's what early sets the stage for a lot of the pain you went through. You leave Dallas at 16, and then what happens then?

KEEYA: Before we get to leaving Dallas, I went to one of my friends' proms that was in Tulsa, Oklahoma. So I got on the plane by myself, it was my first trip by myself, and I met a guy who was about 27 years of age. We exchanged numbers. I was very needy and he—basically on the flight told him what I was going through at home with my dad. And he said, "If you ever need anything just give me a call."

I remembered that in a moment of just utter devastation with my father where he was suffering, it was kind of like a withdrawal from drugs. And I found him in the closet one morning. It was a terrifying situation. He was shaking. I just knew he was not well. So he kind of explained at that time, that's how I found out he was on drugs. He explained to me that he was on drugs, and it was just over the top. It was too much; I couldn't handle that.

And then he became very aggressive and very violent. So he threatened to kill me. And

my mother actually kind of stepped in between us because he was throwing a punch and it landed on her and I ran out the door. When I ran out of the door, I called the police and that was the beginning of my escape from that situation.

SHEILA: So where did you—did you call that guy who had given you his number?

KEEYA: Yes, I did. I called him. I told him this is what has happened. He lived in Atlanta, Georgia. And he said, "You can come and stay with me. I have a house, I have space." And that's exactly what I did.

SHEILA: Did you realize because that sounds like an opportunity; here you are in a devastating situation, hopeless, not safe? A kind person gives you a number and invites you. How long did it take before you realized this is not quite what you thought it was going to be?

KEEYA: Well, not very long. I wasn't there with him very long. He actually tried to show me around. He took me to a nightclub. My story is riddled with red flags, okay? But he took me to a nightclub and I met another gentleman. When things didn't work out with that situation, I just found another. This is where the trafficking began. That gentleman actually worked for a record producer, a very famous one. He said, "I know exactly who you need to meet, who will be able to take care of your needs. Do you need a place to stay? You can have a place to stay. Do you want to be in a music video? Hey, we'll put you in a music video."

And so for me at 16 years of age, I'm like I have struck gold. Now I'm going to be safe, they've got the money, they can take care of me. It was probably that night when the producer came with his entourage, and he met me and basically sized me up. And please forgive me, I'm trying to get through this, but he sized me up and said, "Oh yeah, you can live with us. But it's going to be an exchange for taking care of everyone."

So I did live with them. I was the only female and also, I was 16 years of age. I made sure

to do everything that they said to do. The initiation was very brutal; it was basically a gang rape. I had been threatened throughout my time living there that if I told anyone at any point that they would not find me. And the guy who told me that was their security. And he had these red teardrops tattooed on his face. And he would always remind me that I could become one.

RANDY: Yeah, and the tear drop is—

KEEYA: It represented people that he had killed before. Yeah.

RANDY: So Jeez.

SHEILA: Just one of the things that is so clear to me is, so often people think, well, why didn't you just leave? Or why didn't you do that? It must have seemed to you like you had no other opportunity, no choice. Where were you going to go?

KEEYA: Yeah. And I was a homeschool student and I think this is important to know because when you're looking at the situation when I look back and I think about other people who have gone through sex trafficking or human trafficking, what these people are looking for are low-hanging fruit, vulnerabilities. And my greatest vulnerability was I did not have a tight family unit, and I didn't have cousins and aunts and uncles. My father had estranged my mother and that was how he was able to be very abusive and in control. And so I didn't have people checking after me. There weren't truancy officers looking for me because I was a homeschooled student for many years. So my mom was my teacher.

SHEILA: In a situation like that, do you stay with the same person for years, or do they kind of pass you around?

KEEYA: For me, I got tired of what was going on really quick. But I basically went from one handler to the next. So I just felt like I was a magnet for these people. There was a lady who was like, "You don't need to be around them." So I'm thinking, okay,

great. No, I don't. She's been to the house, she's been to the different parties and the different after parties, she knows that I don't need to be here. And so I was just clinging to her. But she would also traffic me. And so it was just bouncing around all these different handlers, if you will. Then finally I said I can run my own enterprise, if you will. So at a very young age, I was probably 18 or 19, by 18 or 19, I decided to become an exotic dancer. That was my way of not being under anyone's control.

RANDY: Were drugs a part of this?

KEEYA: Yes!

RANDY: Now is that for numbing the pain or is that for control? Or was it just part of the culture?

KEEYA: I think it was just their lifestyle. And for me, it was numbing my pain. I'm not sure what they were running from but for me, it was introduced, it was always available, it was always there. So yes, it was a part of the environment.

SHEILA: I look at you today and I look at your countenance and I look at the love of Christ that's in your eyes, how did Jesus interact with your situation and bring you from the pit of hell?

KEEYA: Yes! Well, first of all, I would say this was 1997, and this is when my mind was not able to continue and so I had a nervous breakdown. At the moment, it was the worst thing in the world. It was like now I have another, yet one more thing to be ashamed of because I went into a hospital and had all of these medications. And now I have a new moniker, I have got a label, something that I don't want, yet that's exactly what God used to meet me.

And so my brother actually is the one who came to—I finally got in touch with him. Because for years I also, I didn't tell the truth to my mom and my brother. I always just—

I couldn't tell them that. We grew up in church. I knew better. So I would just lie about everything. But when I had that nervous breakdown, he came to get me. Literally, my brother was my rescuer.

When he drove from Dallas to Elizabeth, New Jersey, and brought me back home, he said, "Keeya, things are going to be very different in your life." I had to tell him everything. He said, "We're going to go back to church like we used to." And that's exactly what we did. But it was not just that simple. Because now I have to work through mental illness. Now I have to work through all of that and try to become just a normal person because my search was for normalcy, I just want a normal life. I don't want to be so abnormal.

So that process was me going to church every time the doors were open, number one. And I know it only takes accepting Christ into your heart one time, but every time there was an altar call for like two months, my brother had to stop me. He's like, "Keeya, you don't have to keep going up there."

I'm like, "Dean, no! I've got to make sure I'm good!"

But anyway, the journey to healing was definitely—

SHEILA: It is a process, isn't it? It is not just a—

KEEYA: It is a process. I went from making a lot of money to working at Wendy's getting \$89 every two weeks and being okay with that, and tithing off of that. But I promise you, I was joyful about it.

RANDY: When you look back on the time, how many years were you trafficked?

KEEYA: That was from about '91 to '97.

RANDY: So there are about six years in there. You grew up in church, of course, you went back to church to find your healing, where was God for you during those six years?

KEEYA: I believe God was always there keeping me alive. Because I knew women in the lifestyle who are no more. Who you know, would go off with pimps and then you wouldn't hear from them again or you'd hear the worst. And so, I know that in and of itself was God protecting me. And I'm not saying that their lives were not important but that was their journey. And so allowing me to, number one, not kill myself because I suffered from homicidal ideation, I hated men. I suffered from suicidal ideation and just extremely low self-esteem. And so God was still with me though. I would have interactions with people and they're like, "You just don't belong here." I would hear that a lot; different settings, these people didn't know each other and it just kind of called to me. I even remember, you know, certain gospel songs I would hear in a store or wherever it was that I would just hear something or see something on TV and it was like this hunger. But it's just like I didn't deserve it anymore. So I would come from out of that hunger and then just kind of shun it away.

RANDY: Explain the title.

KEEYA: *One Thousand Elsewhere*. So *One Thousand Elsewhere* came from Psalm 84:10. That is where I found myself, when I came back to the Lord, and I rededicated my life. I realized truly, better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper than dwell in the tents of the wicked. The tents of the wicked have nothing for me. So the safety and the love and the arc of safety that I found in rededicating my life, and the love that I was shown through the church, through serving, there is no comparison.

I've always said, I feel as though, I saw that type of evil so that I could realize just how good God was. And that's what—I hang onto that. A lot of people ask, "How did you do it?" I'm like I don't know how I did it. I know how he did it. He just kept me alive. I know that he already made sure that my salvation was secure and that all I needed to do was

accept his gift.

SHEILA: How do you see God using your life today? I know you're married now to a pastor; we got to meet him, a very cool guy. How is your story impacting the lives of others now?

KEEYA: Yes. So now I have the wonderful opportunity to give back. What that looks like is I have the opportunity to speak; I'm spoken in schools, alternative schools. I've spoken in churches. But now, I get to work directly with the population whom I consider my family, those who have come out of human trafficking or sex trafficking. And so that's what I get to do on a day-to-day basis.

I actually have the joy of working for a safe house, Bochy's Place. Carla Shellis is the amazing founder. When she heard my story and allowed me to come and serve there, it really, really—it's just a calling. It was just a fit. I feel like just a fish in water among these women. I'm grateful for that, being able to do that. I'm grateful for it, just even being able to put everything together, and for people to tell me how it is impacting them.

SHEILA: Was there ever a moment where you and your dad were able to reconcile?

KEEYA: Yes. For a number of years, this was probably about 17 years, we did not speak. I was satisfied with never speaking to him again. I felt that he fulfilled his duty in making sure me and my brother came to the earth, and that was enough. However, God also used that longing. There still was a longing, especially after I got married and had children, and I just wondered, I wondered if he was okay because we didn't speak.

So I reached out to a private investigator to find his whereabouts, and I located him. His life has turned around and he rededicated his life to Christ. And he's clean and has been clean and sober for nine years. He's remarried. He's doing well. I was able to reconnect with him.

RANDY: I have one last question because I introduced you as someone who was victimized by human trafficking, sex trafficking. Your book says, "A Survivors' Story." And that's all in your past, and you use that to help people now. But when you look in the mirror, who do you see? And who do you think God sees?

KEEYA: I just see someone redeemed. I see someone who is living old enough to need concealer a little bit more than she used to. I consider that a joy. I see someone who has been healed and is still walking through a healing journey. Through all of this, I did keep very close contact with my mom; she is one of my best friends. But we, oftentimes, look back together and say, look at what God has done for us! Look at what he has done.

So how do I view myself? I view myself as redeemed. I view myself as worthy of the love of God.

SHEILA: Daughter of the King of kings! And you know, here, Randy and I talk about this a lot, but Rescue LIFE is so important to us because we've had the privilege of traveling to many parts of the world where young girls feel there is no hope. But you and I have the privilege of letting them know that there is hope. Would you watch this? Would you watch this?

On the mission field

SHEILA: There are some things you can't unsee or stories you can't unhear, and honestly, you would not want to. I've seen things on this trip that are worse than anything I could imagine.

I just spent some time with a little girl who is now 11, and she's been forced to have sex with men, with strangers, sometimes four a night since she was nine years old.

Open Captions: I was born into a poor family. I have a stepmother who makes me go out begging for money... I beg until late at night. There are men who rape me and take me

to a bad place.

SHEILA: I'm so, so sorry! Do you have to go with men every night?

Open Captions: Yes. I'm scared when I have to go out at night. I just want a good home with food to eat and a place to sleep.

SHEILA: The scripture says the Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. I've seen what it looks like to be crushed in spirit when you're 11 years old.

So this is our moment to be Christ in the flesh to those who are broken.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: Keeya, let me ask you when you watch a piece like that, and you see children as little as that, do you have children of your own?

KEEYA: Yes. We have three children, two boys and a girl.

SHEILA: What does it do to you when you see how young these children are that we're working with?

KEEYA: It breaks my heart. It's hard to view and know that they're suffering in the way that they are. It's unimaginable!

SHEILA: Let me tell you, those trips to Southeast Asia, have completely changed my life. I will never be the same again, and I'm grateful for that. When you have a chance to sit with some of these precious little girls and that's what they are, they're precious children. Because see, the way that God intended things to be is that we would all be in

families. There would be a mom, there would be a dad, and there would be children. There would be love, there would be safety, and there would be security. But for so many of the children that we work with in Southeast Asia, there is no family structure. Some days the father is in prison.

One of those little girls I was talking to, the dad is in prison, and the mom ran off with a younger man. And at 12, she is the head of the household. And one of the reasons that she doesn't try and escape the lifestyle is that her traffickers have told her, "We know where you live. You try and escape, we're going to go after your sisters."

It is absolutely heartbreaking! But we've had the privilege of praying with these girls and telling them that because Jesus died, they have a hope and a future. But right now, right at this very minute, there are children who are crying out for help. This is a multibillion-dollar industry and they're organized. And they're on it, they don't give up. You and I, as the body of Christ, have got to be even more organized than them and we can do that.

RANDY: We can and we know because we have and we continue. By the way, we also work here in the United States to break up the sex trafficking rings. And we support several places where girls can go to find skills, safety, wholeness, and healing. So we're doing this across the world. In the United States, we have a lot more support. You go over to some of these third-world countries and there is just not a lot which is one of the reasons we operate in many of those areas.

Here's how it works. The average cost to reach, rescue, or restore one child is \$128. Through a matching gift of many of our friends, longstanding friends, we now can take that \$128 and cut it in half. Their matching gift of \$320,000 means that your gift today of \$64 will reach, rescue, or restore one child. Many of you can do more than that. And I hope you will. A gift of \$128 will reach, rescue, or restore two children. Your gift of \$1280, if you can do that, will reach, rescue, or restore 20 children.

Those are just some of the numbers. Here's the thing you need to hear. We can go into

these dark, dark places. We can rescue children out of this hell on earth. We can give them a hope and a future, and put them on a path to healing. And we can show them God's love.

Will you do that today? Go online, go to the phone and make the best gift you can. Be a part of rescuing, restoring, and showing people the love of God.

Begin video clip

ANNOUNCER: *Innocent children and young people longing to be loved and cared for are being abducted and sold at the hands of violent predators, forced into the evil industry of human trafficking.*

Through Mission: Rescue Life you can reach out to warn children who are at risk for sex trafficking, rescue those already enslaved, and restore young lives and give them a future. With a generous \$320,000 matching gift now your gift of \$128 to help reach, rescue, or restore one child can be doubled to help two children. Your \$64 gift will be matched to help save one child from the horrors of human trafficking. And a \$32 mission rescue gift will be doubled to \$64.

With your gift today, we'll send you "I Hear His Whisper." Each entry in this beautiful 365-day devotional will encourage you with words of comfort, joy, and love as you encounter God's heart and hear his gentle voice.

With a gift of \$128 or more, you'll receive "What Does Your Jesus Look Like?" This captivating book by sculptor, Scott Stearman shares compelling stories and beautiful images revealing how we can be the image of Christ to a watching world.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280 which will now help save 20 children. And you may request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Let the Children Come." Please call, write,

or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: Do go online or go to the phone right now and give the best gift you can. We can make a difference, and we need you to be a part of it. Sheila, this has been impactful.

SHEILA: I'm so grateful to you, Keeya. If you have anything that you want to say to somebody who finds themselves in a situation like that, what would you say?

KEEYA: I would first have to say that if you are out there and you have experienced abuse or you're currently being abused, whether it is sexually or if it is through sex trafficking or human trafficking, I just want you to know that you are worthy of the love that God so lavishly desires, through his son Jesus Christ to give to you. Even if you don't feel like you are, you are! I'm a witness to that. For many years I did not feel as though I deserved that love. But because of the patience of God, because of God being who he is, Jehovah-Jireh, my provider, he provided me with everything that I need, and he'll do the same for you.

SHEILA: If people want to get in touch with you, what's your website?

KEEYA: My website is www.KeeyaVawar.com.

SHEILA: Thank you so much for being our guest.

KEEYA: Thank you so much for having me!

RANDY: See you again next time here on *Life Today*.

SHEILA: God bless!