



NightLight Newsletter Design School Dreamer

May 27, 2008

I stood proudly and snapped a photo as I watched my daughter graduate on Saturday. She and some 60 other international students were graduating and all but two attending college in the fall. I sat down and listened to the impressive schools the students would be attending. . . "Yale. . . Oxford. . . Design school in London . . . Design school in New York." Another face came to mind and I felt a wave of sadness as I thought of Marita.

Marita, 21, is a beautiful young woman from Uganda. We met her on the street of the red light district in Bangkok just a week ago. In a conversation with a team member (Emily), Marita shared that she is a Christian but she doesn't know what else to do. Tears began to fall, and she turned away before the tears could give way to a flood of grief.

The next time we met with her, Marita introduced her friend. "Ali" is 20 and thought her aunt was bringing her to Bangkok for a teaching job. Instead she had to work the streets. She is a born again Christian, she said. She hates this, knows this wrong and wants to go home.

We walked to a safer environment where we could talk. They had both dropped out of high school when they got pregnant. After nursing her baby for one year, Marita went back to high school but had to quit before graduating to look for a job. The job Marita found was terminated when she refused to sleep with the boss. A friend told her she could make money in Bangkok. "What choice did I have?" she asked sadly.

I asked Marita what she would like to do. She didn't know. "But what is your dream - what have you dreamed of doing since you were a child?" She looked sad and said, "I always wanted to go to design school." I looked at this beautiful young woman with a stylish hairdo (her aunt is a hairdresser) wearing a creative outfit, fish net stockings and white fur topped boots. Design school is exactly where she belongs, I thought. But design school is a distant dream mocking her as she sells herself in an outfit that she stylishly put together to sell her body on the streets of Bangkok.

My daughter is going off to college. We are proud of her and eager to see her achieve her dreams. Sure we may be in debt for decades to pay for it, but even that is an opportunity for the privileged. It is a privilege that Marita and Ali do not have.

What is it that separates these two young African women from my daughter and the other international school students? Hard work and determination? It takes a lot of determination and hard work to be a prostitute in a foreign country. Faith in God or religion? Most of the international students are not religious by any means and both of these young women pray to God daily. Beauty? Intelligence? Again, these young women have both. The usual, easy answers will not suffice anymore in justifying the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Injustice has had its way. Injustice has ruled the decisions of governments, the use of resources, and the denial of those same resources to girls a world away (or even next door) with the same dreams but no opportunity to realization. While opportunity knocks at the doors of some, injustice knocks down the doors of others.

"What else can I do?" Marita asked. The tears trickled down her cheeks. We could help them go home but even they know that is not enough to keep injustice from their door. We gave them our contact, a word of hope and a prayer. We hugged them and said goodbye. Design school in London. . . my mind goes back to the graduation. I wonder . . . what it would take to see Marita and Ali graduate? Injustice has had its say, but we don't intend on giving it the last word.

Sincerely,

Annie Dieselberg
NightLight