



Annual Report  
2007

## The Founding of Freedom Firm



# Freedom Firm: Our Story

Greg and Mala Malstead, compelled by a unique calling that combined God's heart for justice and His love for the oppressed, moved their young family to Mumbai, India in 2000. Their dream was to rescue young girls from forced prostitution and bring systemic change to the sex-trafficking industry in India. Greg had just been hired as the International Justice Mission's (IJM) Operational Field Director.

Greg, an attorney, established IJM's first overseas office and built a team of investigators, lawyers and social workers. The team worked with local authorities to bring rescue and justice to victims of sex trafficking. In his five years with IJM, Greg led and participated in interventions that resulted in the rescue of over 450 victims of sex trafficking. He assisted in the prosecution of more than 180 perpetrators and successfully attained convictions in 6 groundbreaking cases.

After five years in Mumbai with IJM, the Malsteads were eager to engage in the restoration of the girls in a deeper way. They wanted to assist the girls in the long journey towards healing and wholeness. Meanwhile, they saw vast areas of India that no other NGO had explored, where literally thousands of girls were held captive in sexual slavery. With their four children needing better schooling opportunities in a healthier location, the Malsteads decided to leave IJM and start a similar ministry.

In 2006, the Malsteads founded Freedom Firm in Ooty, Tamil Nadu.

Freedom Firm's investigative team was soon on the ground rescuing minor girls. The very first girl they rescued was Karishma, age 12. In Ooty, Mala, together with professional staff, developed a residential home that cared for rescued girls for the next five years. She also created Leg Up, a unique horse therapy program that taught the rescued girls to overcome fears and learn to care for others.



# The Mission

Freedom Firm seeks to eliminate child prostitution in India by rescuing minor girls, providing effective rehabilitation and prosecuting the perpetrators of sex trafficking.

## Rescue

Freedom Firm undercover operatives locate minor girls in brothels and document the crime. This information is then reported to the police. The Freedom Firm team, along with the police, raid the brothels, rescue the girls and arrest the brothel keepers and traffickers. The rescued girls are then placed in government remand homes and Freedom Firm files criminal complaints against their oppressors.

## Restoration

Freedom Firm's social workers partner with shelter homes across the country to provide rescued girls with counselling, therapy, job training, education and health care. The creative program includes a summer camp and employment with business Ruhamah Designs to help the girls grow in confidence and independence.

## Justice

Freedom Firm actively pursues the conviction of those responsible for trafficking minor girls. Freedom Firm lawyers assist public prosecutors at each stage of the criminal trial. Rescued girls are empowered to testify against their abusers and to help bring them to justice. Every trial and every conviction creates a deterrent and raises the cost of sex trafficking in India.

# Our Team



**Hanson and Fenny Kanagaraj** are newlyweds that joined Freedom Firm in September. They both worked with IJM in Chennai in the area of bonded labor for several years prior to joining us. Hanson (better known as Hans is the director of investigations and communications. Fenny has a Masters in Social Work and will be a part of the Aftercare team.

**Glen and Rebecca Parks:** Glen is a lawyer who recently moved with his wife Rebecca and

their four young children from Lincoln, Nebraska to Ooty, Tamil Nadu. Glen heads up the legal department of Freedom Firm. Rebecca provides a warm, welcoming home to staff and others in the community and endless advice and support to all who are in need!

**Rohi Desai** has a Masters in Counselling, and a hugely compassionate heart. She is game for almost any adventure that comes her way. Rohi joined Freedom Firm in June.



Freedom Firm's 1st investigations team

# Rescue: The Girl Who Launched Freedom Firm

Karishma was the first girl that Freedom Firm rescued from sex trafficking. An undercover investigator found her in a small room, being forced to do prostitution by her own grandmother. She was just 12-years-old . Freedom Firm went to the police with the information, and asked them to conduct a raid. The police delayed for 8 days. When the raid was conducted, Karishma was gone, sold to another brothel. For the next six months, Freedom Firm operatives continued searching for her. A strong lead emerged when Karishma's brother gave information that she was in a town three hours away from her grandmother's brothel.

This time the police cooperated, and Karishma was found and rescued from a truck stop brothel. After the rescue, Karishma was in the Freedom Firm Aftercare home for 3 months. She had no interest in school, had difficulty concentrating, and struggled with bouts of rage and violence toward staff and other girls. Yet she made significant progress and began to learn and trust the staff. Because Freedom Firm's home did not have a license for minors, the government transferred Karishma to a government remand home.

Her violent uncooperative behavior continued, and she was consequently shifted to many different homes. Karishma continually requested the government officials to send her back to Freedom Firm when she was 17 years

old. Today Karishma is known as Rebecca. She recently graduated from Freedom Firm's aftercare program and currently residing in her hometown. Rebecca speaks to girls trapped in prostitution and persuades them to chose a new life. She is interested in working for Freedom Firm's new workshop in Pune, teaching rescued girls to make jewelry.



*Rebecca after rescue in our aftercare home in Ooty*

# Rescue: Torn In Two

We found Anju's\* home in a small town in Bagalkot District, Karnataka. Her 'grandfather' (or so he was called because he looked after her when her mother died 5 years ago) gave us a photograph torn in two pieces. It was a picture of Anju, taken four years earlier. Anju looked pretty, was smiling and there was no sign of brokenness ... and then someone tore her in two. She stared back at me from the photo. She was the same girl we rescued from a brothel in Maharashtra, 200 kilometres away from home, just three days ago.

My first thought was, who did this? Who tore the photograph into two pieces? As I looked closer, I saw that it was a slow thoughtful tear, not a quick rip that went straight across the photo; a deliberate, intentional tear that trailed off to the side as the last bits of paper separated. That's what it's like to live as a devadasi; slow, intentional, deliberate destruction. Long before she was put in the brothel, Anju was dedicated to the goddess Yellama, so was her mother before her. Her destiny was sealed at the age of 3. She would not be allowed to get married, and when the time came, she would be abused by any man that wanted her. There is nothing sudden about the process; the tear in her life began when she was a child.

But somewhere along the line she had hope. When I visited her school to collect her school leaving certificate which is authoritative proof of her age, I discovered that she left school in 2004, just 2 years ago. She had completed her 10th standard! A surprisingly high level of education for a girl destined to be forced into

prostitution. But the force of tradition was stronger - like the tear; slow, intentional, deliberate and inescapable. I wonder now if Anju herself tore the photo when her dreams of an education were shattered, and when she realized what lay ahead for her.

After her rescue, Anju was placed in a Government Remand Home. Now is the time to mend the tear.

(The account on Anju's rescue was written by \_\_\_\_\_, social worker in Freedom Firm)



# Restoration: Recovery from the past, Skills for the future.



Freedom Firm established a rehabilitation home for survivors of sex trafficking in an effort to provide complete aftercare. The home has facilities and the means to provide recreation, education and training for girls and to provide for their physical needs. The home is staffed with professionals and caregivers who will be constantly working towards the emotional recovery of the girl child. It is a protected, warm place for the girls to reside and prepare for their reentry into society. The vocational unit will ensure that the girls receive the training necessary for them to be able to take care of themselves after their time at the home is done. This will enhance and strengthen their belief in the system, in caregivers and in themselves. Our ultimate desire is to rescue minor girls and then, through this aftercare home, prepare them to be healthy, independent women, capable of re-integrating into society and living well-balanced and productive lives.

Freedom Firm aftercare home began with the

hiring of a wonderful team of people from different parts of India and America. Around the same time we found a wonderful old English rental house less than two kilometers from the main town of Ooty. A steep drive leads down off the main road, and gives the whole place a sense of peace and privacy. The house is on a bus route which will allow easy access for girls and staff as they travel to and from town. A five minute walk brings you to reserve forests with endless hiking and biking trails, pretty picnic spots and water lily covered ponds. The place is perfect for the first year of rehabilitation, with eight girls and three staff members.



# A Vision called Avalanche



Greg and I had just moved to Ooty after 5 years of what I call my “wilderness” years, in the heart of the teeming metropolis of Mumbai. They were hard years, learning the reality of what we had been called to. The crush of 17 million people on a fairly narrow peninsula , constant noise, pollution and the poverty, misery and frenzy of the city had stretched and torn my heart in a hundred ways.

Raising four young children in that environment was a challenge that sometimes over-

whelmed me. I longed for clean country air, trees for the children to climb, grass and flowers, and space.

Long before we left, I made my peace with the city. I learned to drive like a race car driver in that madness. I learned that children don't necessarily die from malaria. I learned our daughter could raise frogs in a plastic wagon. All three of our girls found coconut trees to shimmy up. But I still longed to be out in beautiful rural India and raise our children there.



We had come to India to rescue girls from prostitution. The brothels were deep in the bowels of the city. The rescues had to take place there, in the fetid buildings with garbage spilling down steps and rats crawling into the tiny rooms where girls were imprisoned.

If my own children needed clean air and the beauty of nature around them, then what did the wounded girls need? Didn't they need the same thing, far from the scene of unspeakable violence. Didn't they need a small window of time away from the life that nearly destroyed them. A window of time to recalibrate. A window of time to find their true identity? Couldn't nature and pure pursuits and lifestyle heal them? These were the questions I asked in the middle of my city wilderness.

In 2005 Greg and I discovered the small tourist town of Ooty in the mountains of Tamil Nadu, South India. Here was the place we had always dreamed about, the place to raise our children, the place to bring rescued girls. The beauty of the mountains, the flowers, the birds, the nature reserves, the pure air, the cleanness... all took our breath away.

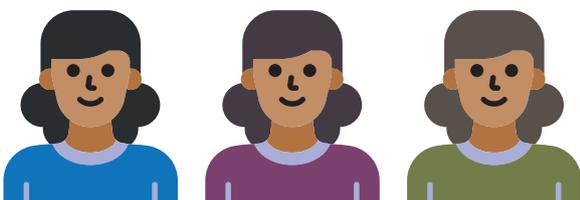
The week after our family relocated to Ooty in March 2005, we had the chance to travel deep into the jungle, an hour and a half away from the town. Bouncing in a rugged ex-military truck that had the strength of a tank, we churned our way through massive muddy ruts through a high altitude rain forest. Breaking out of the dense undergrowth we suddenly emerged onto one of the most breathtaking vistas I had ever seen. Scripture Union (a mission that sets up camps and retreat centers





around India) built a small camp on the edge of a pristine blue reservoir. Gorgeous mountains circled the lake, and no habitation was in sight. It was silent, empty, and quite simply, glorious. Heaven on earth. The window I was looking for. The window the rescued girls needed.

Gazing at the view I had another idea. Could I find a church in the US to fund a wilderness Avalanche camp, four precious days immersed in nature, exclusively for rescued girls? Girls could come from government homes, from private rehabilitation homes, they could come from a whole host of other organizations. Girls could come from the brothels themselves. Come for a break. Come for recalibration.



The camp was wild; a place to confront fears. The lake presented challenges the girls had never encountered before. Rappelling down thirty foot cliff and waterfall and kayaking in the lake would require great trust. The perfect recipe for change. I knew that not a single Indian survivor of sex-trafficking had ever had the privilege of going to a wilderness camp. This would be a once in a life-time opportunity.

Freedom Firm was birthed the next year. Greg and I spent a few weeks in the U.S that summer. I shared my dream with one of the new American board members, Holly Leslie (now Holly Andrews), and her church colleague, Bob Devine in a small coffee shop in Minneapolis. Both were members of Bethlehem Baptist church. Both of them caught the vision and shared it with their church.

In 2007 they brought the first small team of



volunteers from their church to be camp counsellors of the first Freedom Firm Avalanche camp. The church raised the money for the camp, created the curriculum, and brought the team to facilitate the camp. That first camp there were just three or four girls. It was an amazing time of experiencing nature, overcoming fears, sharing life stories ,learning

about God and growing in trust and care toward one another. The songs, games, cameoing, rappelling, swimming, hiking, camp-fires, teaching times, and pure fun are life-changing catalysts. All in the soft and beautiful arms of nature, girls learn there is a God that creates such beauty. A God who loves them.



# Summer Camp at Avalanche



August is usually damp, cold and rainy in Ooty. Almost always. However August was the time when a vision trip from Bethlehem Baptist (John Piper's church) was due for the first ever Freedom Firm camping excursion at nearby lake, Avalanche. With fear and trembling, I booked the camp and made all the arrangements. I had to persuade Scripture Union to open the camp for us (its never open in August because of the rain!). The Bethlehem Baptist group brought new tents, because I knew the camp tents leaked badly. We were ready for the rain. But, unprecedented blue skies and sunny weather greeted us for the whole three days of the camp.

Rescued girls from Oasis and Roja came

together for their first ever experience of camping; roasting marshmallows, kayaking, hiking, trust building group games, star gazing, singing, Bible study and discovery lessons in nature. It was an amazing time of enjoying God's beautiful creation.



## Reha

We have a new girl who has joined our Freedom Firm family. After coming to Roja, she exchanged her brothel-given name for a new one, Reha. It closely resembles the Hindi word for "freedom." It is also after "Rahab" in the Bible, who Reha greatly admires for her courage. Our Reha is also a woman of courage. She ran away from three brothels before she found someone to help her escape for good.

Reha does beautiful Aari work, the intricate Indian beadwork that adorns so many saris, salwar kamise, shawls and other items. She will teach this skill to other girls in the home.

## Karishma

At the end of May, Karishma, (a 14 yr. old girl) was transferred (against her wishes and ours) to a government home. The reason claimed by the government was our lack of a license. Despite having submitted our papers almost a year ago, we have not been granted a license. Please keep this vital need in your prayers. She is currently in government custody, and it is our hope that once a license is granted, she will be returned to us.

## Laxmi

Also at the end of May, Laxmi (a girl who has been with us for the last year) went to "visit her family," and did not come back. Finally, after six weeks of silence, we received a distress call from Laxmi, saying that she was with some boys in Delhi who were locking her up with her ten year old sister. In a true miracle, Laxmi and her sister were able to get away in a rickshaw when the boys were out, and called a contact of ours in Delhi.

After two weeks in this safe-house, Laxmi and her sister came home to Freedom Firm in July. She had a close brush with being re-sold and a serious scare. We are so grateful to the Lord for her safe return. Laxmi is eagerly pursuing her studies in English, Math, Hindi and Geography. Her attitude has completely revolutionized. A local Christian orphanage accepted her sister into their home, and the two sisters can see each other from time to time.



# Staff at Roja

We are sad to announce that Rohi, our counselor, is leaving Freedom Firm in Ooty. We are relieved to say she will continue on as a part-time consultant for Freedom Firm, visiting the rescued girls in the government homes in Pune and Mumbai. She has done a wonderful work in the lives of the girls at Roja and in the government homes, listening to their struggles and helping them work through their conflicts. Her solid foundation in the Lord has

come through in everything she does and says. She will be missed by the Roja girls and staff!

We will also be saying goodbye to Sapna, an assistant peer counselor, who has spent a year with us at Roja. Sapna helped with many things in the home and was my "right hand" in all things with the horse and pony! She will be returning to Hyderabad to be with her mother and sisters. We pray God's blessing on her life.

# New additions to Roja horse family



**Caspian:** In June a race horse owner donated a 6 yr. old retired racehorse to the aftercare program. I am working hard with Caspian to overcome his biting and kicking tendencies, so that he can be a good therapy horse. He is already a fantastic riding horse, so calm and obedient that even my young children can ride him. He is truly a great beginner's horse.

**Hercules:** Three days ago a little pony foal was dropped literally on my doorstep by the local animal welfare society. He was found on a railroad, abandoned by his mother, and failing fast. Within a few hours after some bran and water, the little fellow started coming around, and now he is already frisking about and following us around like a dog. Hercules lives at our house in our garage, since there is no room at Roja! One day we pray we will have a property big enough for lots of girls and animals.

# The Ride of Her Life Horse Therapy, Leg Up

November 19<sup>th</sup> 2007

I am standing on our windswept riding arena with ten girls and visiting staff. The sun is shining and it's a perfectly clear day for seeing the mountain ranges spread out below us. The girls are huddled in a group for protection. The horses pose the first major challenge for the girls. I take a count of how many have ever touched a horse before. None. I start telling them the horses names and how to watch their ears to know their mood. Ears pricked forward shows interest, willingness and a positive attitude. Ears "half mast" eyes half closed reveals a relaxed, resting pose, but ears flat back against the skull indicates anger, fear and displeasure. The girls are listening intently. The possibility of animals having feelings and emotions has not occurred to them before. They are thinking of the horse, not of their fear.

Next I show them the different grooming tools

and how to groom. The girls begin curry combing and brushing Shadow. Quickly he turns from a muddy orange to the light grey he is supposed to be. Girls comb out his long mane and put in a few braids. He is ready to saddle up. I tack him up and then it's time for the first brave soul to mount. As Sony swings up on the saddle she freezes. Eyes wide, body rigid she clings desperately to the saddle horn. Shadow hasn't even moved a muscle. Everyone shouts encouragement and instructions. The blind leading the blind.

Sony pleads with me to not take a step. Chest heaving, face tense, this girl is truly terrified. Everyone is watching. I know how the fear can spread. Slowly I get her to look into my eyes and focus only on me. I take her through some simple exercises; stretches, deep breathing, cross lateral work. In a few minutes she is able to reach forward and stroke Shadow's mane and side of his neck. Her entire body is relaxed.



She gives me a stunning smile, and we are ready to go. We step forward with confidence around the ring. Sony never stops smiling. She continues to ride “no hands” following my lead in arm circles, twists in the saddle and airplane maneuvers.

In five minutes Sony has moved from abject fear to full confidence and faith in Shadow and

in me. I feel honored to be a part of the transformation. Shadow, with his steady, rock solid kind personality has once again brought another girl the ride of her life. Sony may well never have another chance to ride a horse. But that's not really the point. She conquered her fear. She didn't give into it. Sony embraced the challenge, and she has discovered that she can do more than she ever dreamed.

## Establishment

(2007 - 2008) Freedom Firm trustees understood that a solid foundation was necessary in order to build a successful organization. More people were approached to serve as Trustees in Freedom Firm, many accepted and the number of Trustees increased from 3 to 7 individuals. Steps were taken to open a bank account, apply for registration under section 12A(a) of the Income Tax Act and obtain a Permanent Account Number (PAN).



# Freedom Firm Trustees



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