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## **The Register-Guard**

### **Almost a victim of sex trafficking, teen says Eugene police officer saved her life**

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Bailey Gates boarded a plane from Eugene to Portland — her first time flying — on July 27, 2013.

She took another flight from Portland to Los Angeles, and one more from L.A. to New York City that day.

The then-17-year-old remembers the trip clearly.

She was headed for New York to meet a man who she had met online. She left Eugene early in the morning without telling her family.

Her mother reported her missing hours after she left for the airport.

At the request of Eugene police officer Nicholas Reich, who was assigned to Bailey's case that day, a New York Police Department detective and several FBI agents escorted Bailey off the plane when it landed in New York City.

New York police detectives later told Bailey that had she met up with the man, she likely would have been forced into sex trafficking. "Here's your second chance," Bailey recalled the detective telling her while handing her a plane ticket back to Oregon. "Don't blow it."

Since then, Bailey has become a devout Christian, graduated from high school and nurtured her hopes for a career in music. She wants to share her story, she says, to help other teens avoid becoming a part of the sex trade.

She and her family have also learned to not be ashamed to talk about her experience.

Six months after returning to Eugene, Bailey wrote to Reich, thanking him for, in her words, saving her life. She told him that her parents bought her a guitar for Christmas and that she'd written several songs.

"I'd love to hear back from you," Bailey wrote.

After reading her letter, Reich gave Bailey the acoustic guitar he owned for about a decade.

More recently, the Eugene Police Department commended Reich for his efforts to bring Bailey home.

“For me, I never get to see the results when we have investigations,” Reich said. “You don’t get to hear the end story. To see she’s back home, her life is changing and she has a passion to share her story with other people, is incredible.”

The two hope to stay in contact. Reich suggested that Bailey join him on a police ride-along soon. Bailey offered to cook tamales for him.

“She adores him,” Bailey’s mother, Kim Gates, said.

During her junior year at Sheldon High School, things started going downhill for Bailey.

She says she began hanging out with the wrong people, smoking marijuana and drinking — behavior she thought was normal for a teenaged girl.

“Everybody was doing that,” Bailey said.

She and her friends one night were bored and decided to mess around online. They visited online chat rooms, and Bailey started talking to a guy who said his name was Brett.

Brett told Bailey he was a 20-year-old student at New York University, lived in a fancy apartment and had rich parents.

Bailey said she and Brett talked for hours every day for a couple of months. He would send her photos of himself but said he could not do any kind of live video chatting because he didn’t have a camera on his computer.

“We became a couple,” Bailey said she believed at the time.

Brett soon starting pressuring Bailey to come live with him after she told him about problems she was having at home. He promised to pay for her college tuition if she moved to New York.

He persuaded her to use her parents’ credit card to buy a plane ticket and to buy a specific cellphone, which did not have tracking capabilities.

She agreed to meet him on July 27.

“Nothing raised red flags,” Bailey said. “I thought (my) home life was horrible.”

Reich said that’s a typical reaction for teens to have with online predators. Pimps or recruiters often befriend young women before victimizing them, he said.

“To myself, being a police officer and skeptic, it’s easy for me to identify that there’s obviously something not right here,” he said. “For kids and teenagers, it’s not always that obvious.”

Detectives still haven’t been able to track the whereabouts or identity of “Brett.”

Eugene police detective Curtis Newell said trafficking recruiters frequently use social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat to lure Lane County children, most often teenage girls.

The FBI described human trafficking — which often involves prostitution — to modern-day slavery, whereby people are being sold for sex or forced labor.

Newell, who's worked for six years on local human trafficking cases and is currently assigned to the Lane County Interagency Narcotics Team, said such crimes happen more often than most people might suspect in the Eugene-Springfield metro area and surrounding communities. He estimated that local police investigated dozens of sex trafficking cases three years ago, though police were able to only identify a handful of victims in the cases.

"They're out there and we do the best to try to identify them," Newell said of child victims.

Pimps will work a local circuit, spending a couple days in Eugene, then move on to Bend, Medford and Portland, he said.

Sex trafficking is a crime that is "grossly under reported" because many victims are afraid to report the crimes, Newell said. Pimps typically threaten victims as a way to coerce them into not reporting to police or family members, he said.

Newell's most recent case involved 21-year-old Steven Anthony Kidd, of Albany, who admitted in April that he recruited and used two underage girls — including one Eugene girl — to work for him as prostitutes in Oregon and Washington. Kidd is expected to be sentenced to 12 years in prison later this month in federal court.

A 2013 Portland State University study found that at least 469 children in the Portland metro area were trafficked for sex during a four-year period. Nearly all of the victims were female, averaging 15½ years old; the youngest victim was 8.

The study shed light on how many children have been sexually exploited in the Portland area, though the numbers are conservative because the crime is under reported, the university said.

Christopher Carey, a PSU associate professor and author of the study, said he is working to collect statewide numbers for sex trafficking victims. Before his 2013 study, evidence of local children being trafficked was largely anecdotal and not based on research, he said. By conducting a statewide study to understand the scope of trafficking, state programs, service centers and law enforcement tactics can be better tailored to suit victims' needs, he said.

Carey said he suspects the number of children being trafficked within the state and out of state has increased over the last few years, as online recruitment tools have become more sophisticated to give traffickers better access to potential victims.

Aside from luring victims through websites, traffickers have recruited local victims outside of schools, high school house parties, the WOW Hall, Lane Transit District's downtown Eugene Station and outside of the Eugene Public Library, Newell said.

Recruiters also try to lure girls outside of their home state, as in Bailey's case, Newell said. Once traffickers take the victim away from friends and family, their ability to control the victim increases many times over, he said.

"Unfortunately, I think that it happens a lot," Newell said of girls getting sold into an out-of-state sex trade. "A lot of kids end up making it to their traffickers."

Kim Gates still gets teary-eyed thinking about Reich's efforts to help her daughter.

"He put everything on hold other than Bailey that day," she said. "It was just pins and needles the whole time."

Reich was able to find out more about Brett through one of Bailey's friends, who told him that Bailey was headed to New York.

After Bailey did not answer his phone calls, Reich asked Bailey's friend to call her to track which flight she was on.

"This one progressed into a unique situation," said Reich, who has been a Eugene police officer for nearly a decade. "It became more unique the more I learned about Brett."

He got in touch with the Los Angeles Police Department to try to have officers meet Bailey after her connecting flight there, but they didn't catch her in time before she boarded for her next flight to New York, Reich said.

"I initially was nervous," he said of learning more about Brett from a New York City police detective, who has worked on similar cases in New York. "He saw the writing on the wall and knew that it wasn't going to be a good situation."

Reich was able to work with NYPD officials to arrange for detectives to take Bailey off the plane once it landed in New York.

At first, Bailey said she was angry that her parents went to police, but looking back now, she's grateful.

After the five-hour flight back to Portland, Bailey ran to her parents in the airport and hugged them.

"I didn't know what else to do except start bawling," she said.

In her letter to Reich, Bailey said she gets claustrophobic and nauseated thinking about airports and planes. She's had nightmares about being sold into the sex trade.

“Thank you again,” Bailey wrote. “If it weren’t for you, who knows what my future would have held for me?”

Upon her return, Bailey’s parents — Kim and Ron Gates — enrolled her at a private Christian academy for teens, called Teen Challenge, in Boise. She graduated in May.

Bailey never liked school and believed she would not have earned a diploma had she stayed at Sheldon High.

She said she felt angry and upset for several months after running away. She could make phone calls only once every two weeks, or once a week, depending on her behavior.

She also couldn’t drink or smoke at the academy.

“I couldn’t cope with my problems how I used to,” Bailey said.

A Christian band played for the students during a rally with local church groups on Oct. 4. She remembered realizing that day that she wanted to turn her life around, she said.

“I can’t pretend that I don’t have problems,” Bailey said. “I can’t pretend that this didn’t happen, or complain that this shouldn’t be happening to me.”

She was baptized in December and began writing music with friends she made at the academy.

Bailey said she is going to take some time off from school before applying for college.

“I’m just enjoying getting to be normal again,” she said.

Reich tried playing guitar about a decade ago but has since let the instrument acquire dust in his home.

“I knew I had this guitar that I couldn’t get any use out of,” Reich said. “I thought it would be great to give it to Bailey.”

The two recently met at Bailey’s Eugene home. She pulled out the guitar Reich gave her and began strumming a few chords to check whether it was in tune before playing him a song.

“I didn’t know it could sound that good,” Reich said.

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