

Go Further: Q&A with Jeff Blom, IJM VP of Investigations

TRANSCRIPT

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AMY ROTH: I'm Amy Roth, Director of Media Relations at IJM, and I'm glad you've joined us for this podcast. It's my hope that through it you've gotten a sense of the life-saving work our investigators do, the ways in which they carry out that work, and the real dangers and personal costs involved. But before I bring this third podcast for our Freedom Partners to a close, I wanted you to also get a better sense of who is doing this work and why. And to do that, I have invited Jeff Blom, Vice President of Investigations, to spend a few minutes with us talking about his work with IJM.

Jeff, thanks for being with us.

JEFF BLOM: Thank you for having me.

Q (ROTH): Jeff, you're a veteran investigator, more than twenty years on the frontlines. In your work with IJM, what has surprised you most?

A (BLOM): What has surprised me most about this work are the actual ages of some of the girls that I've had to rescue or actually leave behind – girls as young as five, six, seven years old that have been brought to me to be trafficked for sexual exploitation. I conducted a case last year in Cambodia, in which I was investigating trafficking and five girls were brought to me. And the youngest was around six or seven years of age. And as I was there and they were huddled around me trying to get me to select one of them for sexual exploitation, she was pulling on my shorts and trying to get my attention, looking at me with these blank lifeless eyes as if trying to get my attention to choose her for this act.

Q (ROTH): It has to be extremely difficult to see many of the things you've seen, experience many of the things you've experienced. In your three and a half years with IJM, what has stayed with you the most? Is there a specific client? Is there a specific place or moment that you could share with us?

A (BLOM): There's always the haunting memories and thoughts of the ones that I couldn't rescue, that are still there possibly, being abused. But all of them had that same look in their

eyes: the blank stare, the empty eyes, the lifeless faces of ones who have lost a sense of humanity and their soul has been trapped or destroyed inside of them, and there's hopelessness in their eyes.

Q (ROTH): You've mentioned those that you haven't yet been able to rescue. How do you live with that? How do you live with those that you haven't been able to rescue?

A (BLOM): That's a difficult thing that you have to live with. You try to compartmentalize, but yet you know in your heart that they're still there and they were just outside of your reach, and you have to go on. You have to keep pushing yourself and keep going on knowing that ultimately God is sovereign and in control and I believe that somehow they will be relieved of their oppressors at some point in time, and I pray that I can be the instrument in being used for that. But it's something you have to deal with and process through.

Q (ROTH): As you process, and that's a lot to process, do you at least get some encouragement – sustenance, really – knowing that you're not alone in this work?

A (BLOM): Yes, I know that I'm not alone. I know that I have other professionals who are by my side in the field as well as the thousands of other IJM supporters around the world, who have encouraged me through letters and emails and other greetings, through the Global Prayer Gathering, as well as their financial support that enables us to go out and do this work on the frontlines. Without them I could not do the work, and we could not accomplish the mission of our job.

Q (ROTH): Difficult work, clearly. Tell me, why do you keep doing it? And in the midst of it is there also some hope that you see?

A (BLOM): What keeps me going, and I'm sure the other investigators will agree, is that there's always someone out there in need of what we do. In other words, there are victims out there who are being oppressed by sadistic and sick individuals who are trying to gain from the soul of these individuals. And we have been trained and equipped to go out and to help mitigate the situation, and to take charge of these individuals and to be able to bring them out from those oppressive acts. And in my over two decades of experience, I've never had anything that brings more gratification and joy and fulfillment in my life than to be able to do this work.

Q (ROTH): Jeff, what you and your international team of investigators do is truly courageous. So I thank you for what you do and I thank you for sharing with us today.

A (BLOM): Well I thank you for this opportunity and I thank all those who are listening for their support and their prayers.

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