



LOST GIRLS

Written, Directed & Produced by

JULIA VERDIN

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LOGLINE

A former victim who is forced to lure young girls into sex trafficking must confront her inner demons and dangerous employers in order to break free from the cycle of victimization.

SYNOPSIS

When Kara spots 15 year old, Marisol, being treated badly by her classmates, she befriends her and seduces her with gifts and a party invite. However the unexpected happens when Marisol seeing her inner pain gives her a gift that taps into her lost faith and former sense of self. She betrays Marisol in the most horrific way but as we are about to judge Kara, we are shown the darkness of the world that Kara herself is trapped into. We witness her struggle as the memory of her former self returns and she has to make some hard decisions to break the cycle of abuse.

WRITER-DIRECTOR JULIA VERDIN'S

VISION STATEMENT



Lost Girls is a social message film and my passion project.

I became aware of sex trafficking going on in LA and the abuse of young innocent girls when I volunteered at a children's shelter and noticed how shut down some of the young teenagers I was working with were. I started to hear stories about some of the terrible things that had been done to these innocent young girls and it just broke my heart. As I started to do more research and ask more questions, I was horrified to learn the scope of the problem and became passionate about finding ways to help protect the innocence and childhoods of these young children. As I am a filmmaker and have seen the power film can have in raising awareness on important issues, I decided to make this film. I had read and heard many stories from many young girls and as I wrote my story outline, I used bits and pieces to create my own. I decided to keep the story simple and centered around the predicament of two very different young girls that would raise awareness about the terrible, growing problem of sex trafficking.

With Marisol's story, I wanted to highlight how important it is for parents to be in tune with subtle shifts in their kids' lives. To do this, I show the consequences of how a mother with the best intentions for her daughter is still disconnected from her life. A scene in the front of the movie portrays different beats of the downsides of parents merely hitting the standard check marks. The mother is upset that there is a stranger in the house, but it takes seeing a stranger spending quality time with her daughter for her to realize her daughter has her own needs, such as help with social skills and learning how to develop a dress sense and use makeup.

In my story, Kara is the one who exploits these unrecognized needs. And yet, paradoxically, Kara does not see coming the other side of a parent's unintentional negligence: their deep, stubborn caring. The challenge for me was to create a board and story world on which all these points would effectively register.

I ultimately used the mother's character as a tool to show the change in Marisol before and after being trafficked. The mother also functions to suggest the deep reserves of strength that Marisol drew upon while she was at the trafficker's house. Her upbringing and her mother's influence was the source of her faith amidst her horrendous hardships. Importantly, it also provided her the compassion and protectiveness she felt towards Beth, a younger victim she meets in the house. Later, when Marisol realizes the undercover detective is there to help, the first thing she does is tell him about Beth and the other girls. In fact, the undercover operation would be in jeopardy if Marisol did not catch on, and when she does, she is able to own her part in the story.

Connecting the stories of Kara and Marisol is another underlying theme: the power of faith and prayer. I suggest this primarily through intercut shots of the mother and daughter praying. The rosary serves as a powerful symbol in the film. Marisol giving Kara the rosary reminds Kara that she too has faith deep down, even though she believes she does not deserve redemption. In the end, the image of the rosary as she is leaving is what gives Kara strength to make the crucial call to the police. It is one of her few belongings she takes from her old life as she walks away from it.

Moving on to Kara, in the script it was important to show why Kara, considering her own past, does not do more to help Marisol, as this would make her empathetic to an audience. And yet, empathy is had for Kara when we see her abusive relationship with Greg, how she has been emotionally manipulated by him, and is unwittingly trapped in an evil system of recruitment and trafficking.

My backstory for Kara, which I only hint at in the movie, is that she was a runaway, recruited by Greg, and given to Romina. Because she was well-behaved, they trusted her and she 'graduates' to becoming Greg's girlfriend. He manipulates her with emotional push and pull: violent abuse to get things done, but puppy declarations of love when he sees he has gone too far. Kara thus seems evil on the surface but she is just another victim of the system. Her meeting Marisol and her mother, along with the rosary, are what gradually make her recoup her

buried self-esteem. After she makes the phone call, she too owns her part of the story. She is now restored to her original identity and name: Ivana.

A final theme running through the film is the persistence of the cycle of abuse in the world of trafficking. I suggest this through the theatrical gesture of abusers grabbing their victims' chins. Greg grabs Kara's just as Romina grabs Kara's and Marisol's. It is thus implied that Greg too is a former victim of abuse.

I hope this film will resonate with people and help young people to be more aware of the clever ways traffickers target their victims and encourage us all to look at what we all can do to help protect the innocence of our children and stop this huge growing global problem through changes in laws, speaking against the sexualization of underage children in the media and supporting the police and organizations working so hard to fight against this. Just spreading the word and creating awareness is a huge help too. We have listed various ways people can help on our website. There is power in numbers and however busy we are, if everyone takes one small action in whatever way they can, I believe it will make a difference!



In terms of creating a style for the film DP and I decided to employ a more formal approach in the first half of the film and then as Marisol's world got darker, go in closer with more hand-held in the second half. Production design-wise, we used religious iconography in Marisol's house to suggest her background. We showed that her living environment was warm and appealing, in contrast to Kara's that lacked personal possessions since she and Greg lived out of suitcases, to give a feel that they were always moving around and hiding. For the trafficker's house, we wanted to set up a bleak, dark and oppressive environment.

Costumes-wise, we accentuated the young age of the girls but also contrasted Marisol's well-dressed friends with her own frumpy clothing to suggest her sense of alienation, lower socio

economic standing and the overprotective environment she came from. I also wanted to show that she had no role models in her life to teach her how to dress and wear makeup, making her the perfect victim for Kara. Though her mother was caring and loving, she was working two jobs in order to put her in a good school and so pressured her to work hard and make the most of the educational opportunities she was being given. Though the mother's intentions were good, Marisol was put in an environment where she could not keep up and had a hard time making friends and was looked down on.

I set the film in Los Angeles to counter public perception that sex trafficking is a 'third world' problem. Rather it is a global problem, a problem at borders but also in a metropolis like Los Angeles.

My hope is that this film will resonate with many types of audiences: international and domestic, urban and rural, teenagers as well as parent figures, activists as well as NGOs. I wanted to show the plight and inner worlds of young girls who undergo the trauma of being trafficked. That's what inspired me to make the film.

JULIA VERDIN BIOGRAPHY

www.juliaverdin.com

WRITER-DIRECTOR JULIA VERDIN

ON CASTING



I cast **Marisol Nichols** as **Romina** whilst I was developing the script. When we met at a party, I found out she was an advocate against sex trafficking and very passionate about raising awareness on this topic. Knowing about her passion as an advocate and being a fan of her work, I developed the Romina role with her in mind from the start. It was interesting having her playing a trafficker when she is such a passionate advocate against trafficking. We decided together that Romina should be the type of woman who you would not suspect of being involved in such a dark world if you met her socially. I wanted her to have a removed quality emotionally to indicate that she was herself a victim of abuse at one time, and so has become hardened by it and emotionally detached from it. To her the girls are commodities; she treats them like pieces of meat. She was a businesswoman who was also running several other cover businesses to launder her money, so she appears well dressed and elegant.

For the role of **Kara**, early on I had decided on **Bar Paly**, an actress I knew well and whose work I really liked. She has charm and charisma, but an internal vulnerability and complexity about her, which were the exact qualities I wanted for the role. For the opening scene to work, I wanted her to come across in a very engaging way as the perfect friend a young girl would be excited to have. Both Marisol Nichols and Bar Paly took direction well and worked hard with me at creating histories for their characters. They really committed to their roles.

I auditioned a lot of young actresses for the lead role of **Marisol**. It was a hard role to cast as I needed to find someone over 18 who could believably play 15. On a short shoot and small budget, I did not want to be restricted by limited work hours that come with working with minors. Many of the actresses I auditioned were good performance-wise but had a knowing, worldly quality about them. I wanted Marisol to be very sheltered and innocent, with expressive eyes. I ended up casting a young actress, **Cristina Cibrian**, who was 19, 5' 3, and had a very open, round face and big eyes. She had a real innocence and vulnerability about her. I felt that the innocence of the character was key to making the film work.

For **Greg**, I wanted an actor who was very charismatic physically but also had a lot of inner turmoil, and could change very quickly from being very charming to being manipulative and abusive. It was important to believe that he would be capable of having a hold over his prey. **Will Brandt** had all those qualities and also a vulnerability about him, which gave another interesting dimension to the character.

For **Mrs. Sanchez**, I went with an actress, **Sienna Goines**, who I had worked with before as a producer. I knew she was a very strong actress in terms of emotional range and had a vulnerable sympathetic quality. Additionally, she had the look to believably play Marisol's mother.

For **Beth**, I decided that it was key to the story to show just how young some of the trafficked girls were, so I cast an actress, **Tori Griffiths**, who was 15 but looked 13. She was surprisingly good for her age and had a fearlessness about her that, given the toughness of the subject matter, was important. She also had a very innocent wholesome all-American look that I felt would work very well visually. She was great at taking direction, and I was really happy with her performance.

For the rest of the casting, I looked into the talent pool of the many great actors I know. I was thrilled that **Jamie Harris**, a veteran character actor who always does something really interesting with each role he plays, agreed to play the undercover detective. **Rena Owen**, who is a formidable talent and is as passionate about this issue as I am, kindly agreed to play one of the cops. The other cop was played by **Steve Propster**, an actual cop and actor who I had worked with on *2 Jacks*. He also kindly helped with coaching the actors playing the SWAT team in how to move correctly.

I sat down with each of the lead actors and went through the script line by line to make sure they clearly understood the subtext of what the character is really saying with each line. We also discussed what their character was thinking about and what they really wanted from other characters. Working with each actor before shooting paid off, saved a lot of time on set, and meant the actors and I were all on the same page intention-wise from the start.

I also discussed with them the background of their characters and how, as a result, they might use certain props and the emotional connection of each particular prop. The Rosary, for example, that Kara sees in Marisol's room and later Marisol gives her, had a strong emotional connection for both of them. It set up Marisol's strong religious background and strong faith. It was a key turning point for Kara's character and what instigated her to change as it reminded her of the faith she once had, which helped to slowly bring her to find her inner strength and eventually reclaim her identity.

To this end, I talked through my emotional beat sheet for the film with each actor and identified his or her important emotional moments. This was an interesting exercise and sometimes an actor would come up with great ideas too.

I also talked through with each actor what emotional or sensory memories of physical events he or she might be able to use in certain scenes. This was harder with Cristina as she did not have a lot that she felt she could relate to and also had less training and understanding of how to use these acting tools. Thus, for Cristina, I also suggested observation techniques as when playing a character that goes through experiences that fortunately she has never had, thinking of people to identify the character with and also suggested a couple of films for her to watch.

Anton Narinskiy and **Jonathan Julian**, who played Romina's two henchmen, both had great strong physical presences, and **Taylor Hender** is a very interesting young actress who I knew would be perfect for Jenna.

I really had a wonderful experience with all my actors and they gave so much to the project. Even though we were exploring a very dark world, we were able to maintain a great atmosphere of collaboration on set, all got on very well, and were very giving and supportive to each other and the film.

CAST INTERVIEWS

BAR PALY (KARA)



Q. How did you get involved in Lost Girls, Bar?

A. I got involved in Lost Girls because the director Julia Verdin is a close friend of mine, and it was a passion project for her. And once I began talking to her and learning about human trafficking, I started to feel very passionate too. I was surprised to learn that human trafficking is something that happens here in the United States. I was aware that it happens in areas of Russia, in Romania, in countries that we are not connected to, or small countries. I thought very much it was a Third world problem. But in the US alone, I was surprised to learn that there are around 300,000 girls being trafficked. It's something we need to address and open our eyes to, and say hello, it's happening in our backyard.

Q. How did you prepare for the role of Kara?

A. I did a lot of research. I read a lot of stories online of human trafficking survivors. I also tried to put myself in that mindset.

What's interesting to me about Kara, if you look at her on the surface, she is a villain who takes this young innocent girl and destroys her life. However once you understand the whole process of human trafficking, it's a vicious circle. If you have been caught up in it from a young age, or at any age, there's no real way out: It's hard to say, "Now I'm free. I'm going to go and live my life normally, since you've been damaged on many levels, especially psychologically. And I don't think, those girls have any other way to survive, they don't know another world. So they stay in the same world. In this story in Kara's case, she was a former victim and now she's not in prostitution but she's the one recruiting the girls. Her justification for it is that, a) she doesn't know anything else, and b) because Greg has a certain psychological control over her, she looks on him as her protector and does not think she can survive with out him. And that was very interesting for me to explore, and to show that aspect of her predicament. So though it may seem really wrong on the surface, you can't really judge a lot of those girls, 'Oh she does it because she gets paid. She agrees to that.' Even at certain points when she seemingly could leave, and say, 'I'm done with it,' she can't because she does not know how to handle the real world.

Q. What was your understanding of the relationship between Greg and Kara, the hold that he had on her?

A. In reality, like all of us, she is very desperate for love. She really, really needs someone to just love her. Because she never had it in her life. She translates his behavior as love. That's what she knows. He hits her because he cares. He buys her stuff because he cares. She's so desperate for this love that she's willing to buy into it. And he's definitely taking advantage of it. And she comes to the realization that this is not it. But it comes really from a deep need to be loved, and she's willing to overlook everything else to have that for herself.

Q. Do you have a favorite scene in the film?

A. I definitely think that the scene when Kara takes her power back was my favorite to shoot because it's very empowering to women, to me, as a woman, as the actress and as the character. And also that transition, that moment of taking courage and going for it and not standing any more abuse.

Q. Was it difficult dealing with the abusive relationship? How did you let go of that when you went home?

A. It's interesting because with certain actors, even when you're not shooting, you carry on that relationship. Like with Marisol's mother, we really tried, and she's a lovely woman, lovely actress, but during the shoot, we really wouldn't interact too much. I felt like Kara wouldn't feel that comfortable around her. So I wanted to kind of have this awkwardness and insecurity around her in our scenes, because I think it lent it something. Even with the actress who played Marisol, I did try to become her best friend, because then she feels more comfortable with me.

More trusting. I think that kind of carries into the character. And it's good to keep it between the takes. I think with Will, who plays Greg, I think it was too painful to carry on when we would stop shooting. We'd just burst laughing or something like that. Because, again, it's a defense mechanism. It's too heavy a relationship to carry with you throughout, for a week.

Q. What would you say to a mother whose daughter went missing?

A. It's a pain that I could not even try to imagine. Probably what I said from this whole message of this film is to never lose hope.

Q. Would you say girls like Kara become emotionally numb because they are carrying so much shame and anger too about what's been done to them. They feel like that's all that they know so it's okay to do that to someone else.

A. It's hard for me to answer that because I have not met a lot of those girls, or spoken to them about this specific question. I think me as a human being, if something really horrible happens to you, I have this tendency to kind of blocking it out. It's not that I don't know what happened. It's sweeping it under the carpet. To act as if it didn't happen then it almost didn't. I think it's a defense mechanism, really.

Q. Now there's a separate film that is just Kara's story. In Kara's story we see a little bit more about where she came from and that she was a runaway and met Greg. And she basically repeats what was done to her to Marisol. Could you chat a little bit about that.

A. Yes, so part of the reason I was attracted to the role of Kara is that it shows the vicious cycle of human trafficking, that there is really no way out. **Maybe part of Kara's justification of doing this to Marisol and many other girls is, 'It was done to me. So what makes this girl better than me?' There's a certain, I guess, despair in her as she sees that nobody's better.** I mean, it could be done to anybody. So it's partially why she's doing the stuff she's doing to those girls. But she's also closing her eyes to really is happening to them after. I don't think she's really excited to go back to those memories. For me she was trying to block that part of her life, trying to pretend it didn't happen. 'Now I live with my boyfriend. Everything's great.' Because she so desperately needs that, that kind of normalcy, happiness, love.

CRISTINA CIBRIAN (MARISOL SANCHEZ)



Q. What was it like to play the character of Marisol Sanchez?

A. It was incredibly intense as she is an entirely different character than I have played previously. I really had to get into a completely different mindset to connect with her. I had so much fun on set and it was an incredible experience.

Q. How different is she from other characters you have played?

I had never played an incredibly vulnerable, abused character before. She's an incredibly shy girl, focused on her studies, with a very strict mother. After she is kidnapped, she has a huge transformation. She goes from being the shy, awkward girl who's just a typical high schooler to becoming a beaten and abused sex trafficking victim. It was very intense and emotionally draining but she was a great character for me to play.

Q. How do you prepare for a role like this?

A. I am a researcher by heart. So the first thing I did was study this issue and read the stories of real life victims. I also had to spend quiet time in meditation to prepare for the dramatic shots. I immersed myself in this character until I felt I could tell her story.

Q. Did playing Marisol empower you in any way and how do you think it will empower other girls who are watching?

A. She definitely did empower me. I wanted to make sure that she never loses the will to break out of the house, to go back to her mom, and live her normal life again. No matter how beaten and abused she is, she never just succumbs to the inner workings of the sex trafficking house. My goal was to empower other girls. I didn't realize that sex trafficking is an incredibly prevalent issue in California and all across the world until I did research. I was horrified about how every day, normal girls like me could be taken from their families in an instant.

Q. Do you think Marisol and Kara ever meet again? What will Marisol's reaction be when they meet.

A. I would like to think they will. I don't think Marisol would hate her. I would like to think she wouldn't. Since she's incredibly shy and awkward, this experience has changed her forever. She will be broken for a long time but will have the ability to rebuild herself, and look at the world differently. As a result, I do think she will find it in herself to forgive Kara because she was also a victim. Although what Kara did was incredibly wrong, in so many different ways, ultimately she realized her actions were wrong and she wanted to make it right.

Q. Where you aware of this topic before getting involved in film?

A. I was somewhat aware of this topic before getting involved in this film. I did not fully understand the scope and magnitude of sex trafficking. I did not fully understand the pervasiveness of this horrific, unimaginable crime.

Q. Any funny stories from set?

A. I am a film student at USC. My roommate Michelle was visiting me on set and we concocted a scheme to make her an extra. We were thinking maybe she would get to be in a scene? Would a star be born? So we asked the director and Michelle was thrilled! She went off to make up and wardrobe and unbeknownst to me she became a fellow victim and now heroin addict. The make up was very good and realistic, so we took pictures and sent them to her mom. However, I failed to mention it was for the movie. Almost immediately her Mom called my mom hysterically crying and asking if Michelle was shooting up drugs. I felt so bad afterwards. I

had to call her mom and apologize. When she realized it was for the movie and how important this issue was, she felt dramatically better. The experience was a learning lesson for us all. Michelle's mom had no idea of sex trafficking and what really happens to the victims.

Q. Do you have any final words for survivors who might be watching this today?

A. Yes. I cannot imagine what it would be like to be taken from my family, my friends and hometown. However, through my research and through trying to connect with Marisol, I've realized that you can make it out alive. You can free yourself from the restraints of sex trafficking.

I want to empower women and I want to make sure they know that they are not alone. That so many people care about them. That so many people will be there for them. And if they can help us make a change, if former sex trafficking victims can help and rally with us, then we can combat this issue.

MARISOL NICHOLS (ROMINA)



Q. We know that you're an activist for anti-sex trafficking. What was it that made you do that? Was there one defining moment, or was it something you always knew you were going to do?

A. Well, it definitely wasn't something I knew I was going to do, just because it wasn't something that has been around or very talked about until recently. I think what finally did it for me was that I couldn't not do something about it. The stories that I heard, the sheer numbers of girls that fall into this field, it's astonishing, as a mom it's terrifying, and as a woman, it's horrific. So I just do whatever I can do. Lend a voice. And hopefully make others aware so we can do something about it. Help with legislation. Pushing certain legislation through. The laws are just catching up with this whole scene.

Q. What was it about Romina that attracted you?

A. I know. I've never played a bad guy before. And it was between Mrs. Sanchez and Romina. I'm just used to sort of tougher characters. As a character, I said, why don't I try that [Romina] and see what that would be. So that's how I chose her.

Q. Is she different from characters you've played before?

A. Yes. Night and day. Romina is... I mean, to be that evil. To only see people as a product, as marketing, as a dollar bill, not as a human being, takes a very specific type of individual that I don't believe is fully alive. I believe they're just dead inside and there's nothing redeemable. There's no, "deep down inside, she's not that bad." No. They are that bad. So she's unlike any other character that I've played, because all the other characters that I've played are human, in some respect.

Q. How else can we put our awareness about sex trafficking into action to save lives?

A. I get tired of just doing the awareness, but then, no one knows. I just had a conversation with someone else, and they were like, 'not really. I mean it's just prostitution.' There's no such thing as a child prostitute. They're not there voluntarily. So, educating [is key]. If you get enough people aware of what the actual is, there should be an outcry. There should be riots in the streets for this. When you're talking about our future mothers, I mean these are future mothers we're doing this to. Make no mistake, these are not voluntary girls who are having 'sex'. These girls are getting raped 15, 20 times a day. That is not okay. They cannot leave. They cannot get out of that lifestyle. And they're trapped. And that's what a slave is. So I think that with just awareness alone, I want everyone to go, 'Alright. Human trafficking. I know what that is.' Not only that. What to look for. Taxi drivers. What can they look for. How can they spot one so they can call the police. We need more police. The same guys that are supposed to handle robbers and burglars and everything like that, the same guys are supposed to track down thousands and thousands of girls per city. We need more jurisdiction. We're just catching up to the magnitude of the problem.

Q. What would you do if your daughter was taken?

A. Oh, don't even go there. I would call the fucking President. To be honest. I can't even entertain that idea. But I can empathize. If I was a mother whose daughter was taken, I would call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. I would call the FBI. I would call every single organization I could find when I google "trafficking." Those are the steps I would take.

WILL BRANDT (GREG)



Q. Before this film started, did you know that sex trafficking existed in the United States?

A. Yeah, I was pretty aware of it. I moved around a lot as a kid, but **I went to high school in Arizona, about 60 miles north of the Mexican border, and it's a huge problem there. Just drug trafficking, if not more. Kids would disappear all the time.** I had a journalism professor in college that would work undercover, reporting on different human trafficking cases. So once I heard about the film, it was something that was pretty attractive. I liked the message in the movie a lot.

Q. Did you learn anything new from the script?

A. Just as far as the specifics go. The mental tactics they use to break the girls down. And **the level of inhumanity they use reminds me of how child soldiers are broken.** The film definitely opened my eyes to the inner workings of the process.

Q. How do you prepare for a role like this?

A. Because I didn't have access to anyone who had personally run girls before, or been a first hand victim of sex slavery, I watched as many documentaries on sex trafficking and "the pimping" culture as I could to try and put myself in "the right shoes" so to speak. With a project like this you just hope you're doing justice to those who have actually been a victim of sex slavery.

Q. Can you tell us a little about the character Greg?

A. To me, Greg is a survivor and a survivalist. I don't think Greg and Kara are too dissimilar from one another. Greg, in my mind, comes from a hugely disrupted background. And his whole life, from a very young age, he's been doing whatever he needs to get by. And survive. Like a wild dog with a pack mentality. An eat-or-be-eaten mentality.

Q. So in your opinion, what else can be done to fight sex trafficking?

A. Awareness, like most things. I think the lack of awareness has to do with the fact that in America sex seems to be a very taboo topic. We like to sweep it under the rug. The fact is, there are 300,000 kids, boys and girls that are trafficked every year. That's a lot of lives that are affected.

Q. What would you do if your daughter or your sister was taken by sex traffickers?

A. I don't even know how to answer that question. Fight like hell until I got them back? I don't have a daughter or a son, but I have a little brother, and to think about that, I can't even imagine.

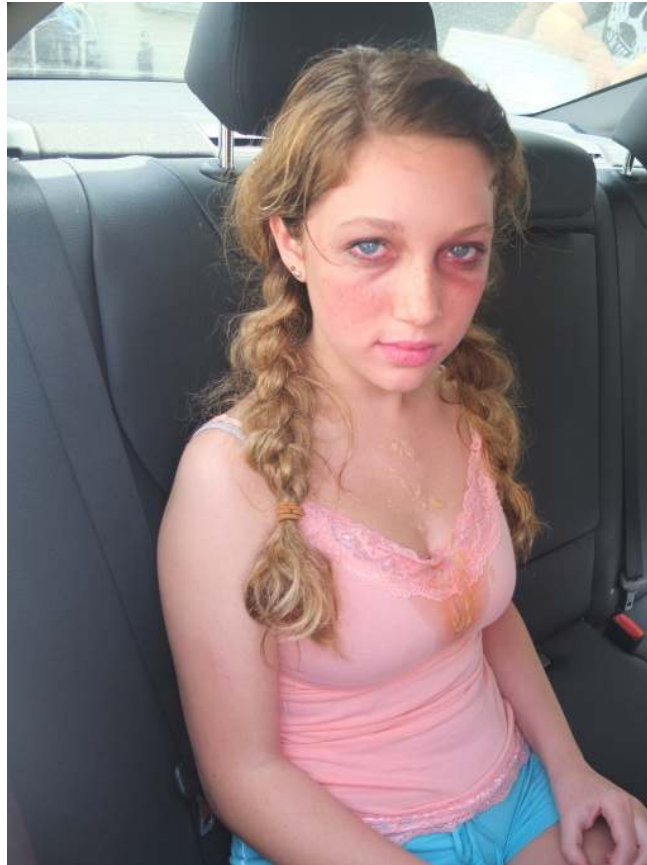
Q. What do you think should be done to the men that actually buy the girls? How should they be treated?

A. Locked away never to see the light of day again.

Q. What would like to tell the audience about you or the character?

A. Don't turn your back if you see a little girl in trouble. If you have even the slightest inkling that something like this is going on, call the cops. And share the film. It has a pretty important message. Hopefully, the more people that know about this problem, the fewer the young people who will be lost to this atrocity.

TORI GRIFFITH (BETH)



Q. How did you feel when you got the call that you were going to play this role?

A. First of all, I was really really happy about it, but then I started thinking about it, I said, this is going to be very challenging, and there's a lot going on. So it was kind of like bittersweet, and I knew in the end it was really going to benefit and bring attention to the problem. I was so happy that I was able to use my talents to do that. I went online and Googled some stories about girls who had gone through this since a young age. I kind of just paid attention to the details of the brothels and the pimps and everything that went on. I kind of just marinated on that, and thinking about what I would do in that situation and how I'd act and be. I really applied that with the lines and everything.

Q. Have you ever played any character like this before?

A. Absolutely not. This is definitely the hardest thing I've ever done. This is probably the most challenging role I'll ever do.

Q. Was there any moment on set that stood out for you while portraying this character? Most fun, most challenging.

A. I definitely am going to say that the shower scene was the most intense moment on the set, because it was that point when I really connected with the character, and became Beth, and also became all the other girls who were going through that, for real, and that was really surreal for me, and I'll never forget that. I had it so heavy in my heart in that moment. I'll never forget it.

Q. And what do you think should be done to the men who buy girls and encourage traffickers?

A. I think that the biggest suffering is realizing what they've done. All the lives that have been affected by this, and the girls who are never going to be the same. They just need to realize how awful it was what they did. And they should just live with that suffering with the rest of their lives. No prison would fulfill what they've done.

Q. For you personally, what carries you through difficult situations? When you face challenges at home or at school?

A. Prayer. Sitting quiet and just saying, "there's so many worse things than this. Don't let this get you down and ruin who you are." And friends and family.

SIENA GOINES (MRS. SANCHEZ)



Q. What attracted you to play the role of Mrs. Sanchez?

A. Well, I'm not a mother but the subject matter itself is just an abomination. And I could relate to the injustice. No child should have their innocence stolen. That's universal.

Q. Everything that Mrs. Sanchez did to get her daughter back, would you have done anything different? What would you have done if it was your daughter that was taken?

A. Oh wow. The scene where the cops tell me they can't do anything: I wouldn't have left that house. I would have stayed there, all day, all night. You'd have to pull me away from that gate. I would watch her every move. "You will never get rid of me." [Laughing] This is why I don't have kids. I can't handle this. I'm controlling already. I know I can't control another human being. I wouldn't survive it. I'd go to jail.

Q. What was it like to work with Rena Owen?

A. Oh my goodness. First of all, I was so excited to find out I was working with her. And the movie that she did, "Once We Were Warriors." This is just a couple years before I started acting. I remember being so moved by that movie. I never forgot it and never forgot her. If that movie were to come out today, she'd win an Academy Award. Hands down. Today, nobody would know her name. That's the day and age we live in. They just didn't look at indies that way back then. It's a shame. She was an inspiration to me. And then, to turn around and do a scene, basically, of what she did in 1994. Just her rawness, her heart. It was just a blessing to have her near me and do the same thing.

Q. What other ways can we create awareness about this issue other than the film?

A. I hope this movie goes to young girls, to make them aware and alert. And also there needs to be [education] for children this age. We're sexual beings. We're moving into our sexuality. We want to be liked. We want to be pretty. We want to play with makeup. We want to be popular. But not everyone can be popular. Okay? I think it's very important in schools that no one be left behind. More with the teachers. More one-on-one. More camping trips. Safe things where these girls feel loved. I think they're getting into this wildness because they're not loved.

My character loves her daughter very much. But she's never home. She's working two jobs. Why am I working two jobs? Because minimum wage is \$9. Who survives on this? Minimum wage should \$15. \$20. We've got to get with it. I think awareness is important. But I also feel like our society and our government needs to be bringing back this American way of standards and morals and middle class. Where is the middle class going? This is the real problem to me. Bring the money back to the schools, to the programs. Safer neighborhoods. Parents who are so overworked that they can't take in another kid who isn't doing so well in their house. These things used to happen when I was young. Doesn't seem to be happening any more. Everybody's just working more now. For what?

CREW INTERVIEWS

ARTURO VARGAS – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER



Q. How and why did you get involved in *Lost Girls*?

A. When I heard about Julia's idea I wanted to help fight a problem that is not getting enough attention in the US.

Q. What was the most special moment for you during the shoot?

A. Bonding with some of the cast members especially Will Brandt and Bar Paly.

Q. What was the most challenging moment, production-wise?

A. Working with so many cast and crew members and making sure everyone was doing their part.

Q. What does the film mean to you?

A. It means to me that its "a must" to get the message out: if anyone has witnessed or sees the activity of sex trafficking happening, they should report it. People need to take a stand against traffickers and save as many victims for those families who are missing their daughters/sons.

JANET ODOGWU – CO-WRITER

Q. How did you get involved with *Lost Girls*?

A. I was interning for Julia when I heard her talk about her desire to write and produce a thought provoking film on sex trafficking. I think it's a combination of how passionate she was when she was talking about it, and the feelings it stirred up inside of me that made me get involved and ask her to let me write it.

Q. What did you know about sex trafficking prior to getting involved with the film?

A. I knew quite a few things about sex trafficking prior to getting involved. I'd watched documentaries that tackled the issue; 263 girls had just been kidnapped in my home country, Nigeria, and were converted to a different religion, some of them turned up pregnant... I always knew sex trafficking was a big issue prior to my involvement.

Q. How did you work with Julia as a writer?

A. I will start by saying that Julia and I make a great writing team. As a producer, she has read countless stories and has given many notes to writers so she knows something about story. I am a screenwriter, so writing and weaving stories together is what I do. She told me the bones of the story and what she wanted, and as a writer, I ran with it. Fleshed it out, and we both read through, she gives me notes, mostly notes I didn't think of. All that passion that we both have, helped develop the story, the characters and the world.

Q. What were your inspirations for the project?

A. To show people that sex trafficking isn't just something that happens in third world countries, but right here in their backyard. For people to see and hopefully share our passion in doing our part to eradicate this horrible thing.

Q. How did you do your research?

A. Julia and I reached out to anti-sex trafficking organizations, and we attended talks and seminars that they held. From National Center for Missing and Exploited children, to Saving Innocence, to CAST LA, just to mention a few. We didn't want to paint a pretty picture, we wanted to tell it as it is, so we heard from survivors about their ordeals, we heard from the LAPD about the traffickers and how they find the kids, and we heard from the centers that care for the kids through out their trauma period. Extensive research went into this.

Q. What does this film mean to you?

A. This film means a step in the right direction for me. I believe in giving more than receiving and this film is like giving back, giving information, giving hope, giving a part of me, just like Julia has given a part of her. This film is personal for me.

We're working on a feature of Lost Girls, which deals with sex trafficking's effects. I can't wait for us to be done with it and for the world to see it.

PETER HOLLAND – DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY



Q. How did you get involved in this project?

A. I was on a panel of DP's that Julia was curating. Public speaking is my one true fear, but Julia was very gentle with me. We became friends and she asked me to come aboard LOST GIRLS.

Q. What was it about the project that appealed to you?

A. The things that appealed to me were the chance to work with Julia, especially on her directing debut and also because this was obviously an important film about an important issue that needed to be told.

Q. When you first read the screenplay, what scene or character stuck out to you the most?

A. The scene that first struck me in the script was when Marisa's mother came home to find the apartment empty. As a parent I was able to feel all the emotions running through her. But as an audience, I knew what Marisa's fate was and felt powerless and distraught.

Q. In what way, if any, did the seriousness of the subject matter and the social message aspect of the story influence the cinematography?

A. It was quite a mental/creative process to find the style of cinematography that Julia & I both felt would serve the film best. We both started with thinking about a stark bleak, 16mm, documentary, CHRISTIANA F. or Ken Loach approach, but we gradually turned that around & settled on a more contemporary cinematic approach. We both felt that the story carried the drama & tragedy and we didn't need to accentuate that through grungy, possibly alienating camera work.

Q. As a DP, how did you approach the shot design for this film?

A. The shot designs were always dictated by the actors. We wanted them to feel liberated in the set or location and not hindered by anything technical. After letting the actors block, we would then devise the shooting plan in accordance with the aesthetic we had settled on in pre production.

Q. As a DP, how did you approach the lighting for this film?

A. The lighting was generally as natural as possible. Where available I would often use reflectors and mirrors outside the location and either bounce light from below the window into the ceiling to give a natural ambience or reflect directly through diffusion frames.

Q. What camera did you shoot on and why?

A. We shot on an Alexa classic. Really for me the choice of camera is less of a concern for me these days. There are 5 or 6 great camera systems out there that all hold up to what we would expect from 35mm negative film stock, and more in most cases. The lens choice is far more important. We used Cooke S4 primes and generally kept the aperture at around T2-2.8. The aspect ratio was 1:240. This decision was heavily debated. We actually started with a 16mm 4:3 idea, then 1:185 and finally settled on the wider aspect. It's hard to nail why we did this precisely, but it we felt it was the complimentary aspect ratio, for the more cinematic aesthetic we were reaching for.

Q. What was the most challenging about the shoot?

A. The most challenging thing on this shoot was keeping the appropriate aesthetic that we'd decided on. One not too pretty to glamourize this dark underbelly of society and the characters in it and not too grungy that the film shouted out, "Hey look at me, grungy pictures, grungy world"

Q. Any funny stories from the set?

A. There are a lot of funny stories from the set, but my favorite was when the police car turned up for filming, it had New Zealand police signage. Oh we chuckled about that one (not) But we got around it with some astute framing and a fence post or two covering up the signage in the wide shots.

Q. What did the film mean to you and what did you take away from it?

A. The film means a lot to me. I have two children and to think that this horror can & is taking place, anywhere in the world, let alone here in a town where I & my family live, leaves me aghast!!

BRAD FILLMAN – PRODUCTION DESIGNER



On set interview

“With *Lost Girls* we definitely tried to create an environment that was parallel: the warmer kind of world that Marisol comes from, and the cold bleak world of the traffickers, when things start to become more stark and empty. When we did the club scene, we definitely wanted to create a disjoining, an environment that you would feel what Marisol was feeling, which was lost and the idea of being manipulated by these sights and sounds. It was a descent into hell, to be sure.”

DAVID BLACKBURN – EDITOR (LOST GIRLS)



David Blackburn's Bio

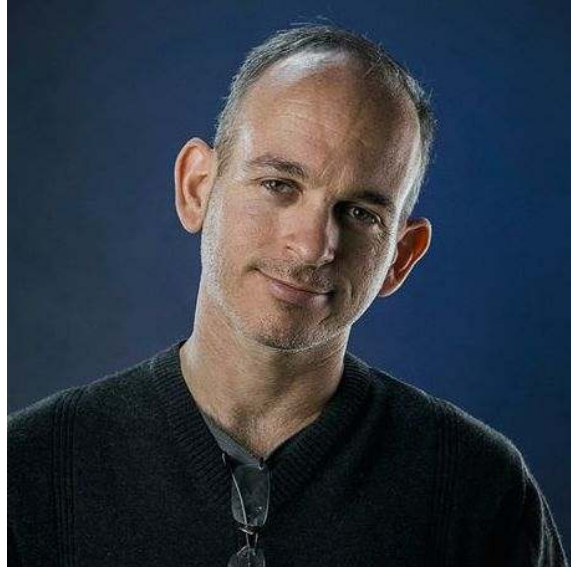
After completing art school in the UK David moved to Los Angeles and cut dozens of high profile music videos, winning the MVPA's Best Editing award in 2005 for Blink 182's Always.

David's studio feature film work includes Warner Brothers' tongue in-cheek action film Torque and coming of age movie ATL. Recent indie features are Adventures Of Power, which debuted at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival and Detention, which debuted at SXSW 2011.

David also cuts commercials for all the major brands, winning the 2011 AICE award for Adidas 'MiCoach'. "I've done a lot of work with action, visual effects and music, but first and foremost, I cut for emotion. Storytelling is key, I pay most attention to the emotional arc of the characters and the story."

Blackburn lives in downtown Los Angeles.

ITAI LEVIN - ADDITIONAL EDITING



Q. How did you get involved in this project?

A. The Line Producer of *Lost Girls*, Micah, was a Producer on a few features I've worked on in the last few years and he recommended me to Julia.

Q. How much did you know about this subject matter prior to your involvement in the film?

A. I was already aware of the severity of trafficking within the U.S., through previous documentary projects. The fact that many people aren't aware of the scale of this issue was also something I've noticed. When Julia introduced the opportunity of being involved in a project that would raise awareness and help protect a vulnerable demographic, there was no question I didn't want to get involved.

Q. When you first read the screenplay, what scene or character stuck out to you the most?

A. Kara's character stuck out to me the most because of her complexity and the fact that she sheds light on the many layers of victimhood within trafficking. We learn that her starting point was even worse than Marisol's and that at one point she has to choose whether to perpetuate her own misfortune to other girls or risk losing the only support she knows. I think Kara's character represents the type of people who can be the key to fight and stop trafficking.

Q. In what way, if any, did the seriousness of the subject matter and the social message aspect of the story influence the editing?

A. The challenge was to balance between communicating the severity of the crimes perpetrated against Marisol and the other girls being trafficked, while not overwhelming the audience and causing them to disengage. The key to achieving that balance was to get the audience emotionally invested in the main characters before any adversity is introduced. Since Marisol is so objectified and dehumanized by her traffickers, it was important to treat her character with extra respect and make sure that the nuances in her emotional situation are emphasized.

Q. How did you approach tackling two different versions of the film: Kara's story and Marisol's story?

A. It comes down to a question of a point-of-view. In each version I've focus on the takes and scenes that followed the point of view of the protagonist, limiting as much as possible the times in which the audience receive information before the protagonist.

Q. What does this film mean to you and what do you hope people will take away from it?

A. I hope people understand from this film that they can make a difference in this issue through taking pro-active, preventative steps. In the same way Marisol's vulnerability was identified by predators who took advantage of it, it could have been identified by people who cared for her.

Even the best parents aren't able to oversee and protect their kids every minute of the day. That means that everyone who interacts with girls like Marisol has a responsibility and an opportunity to make a positive impact. From class mates to teachers and other mentors, everyone can take part in providing girls like Marisol a safer outlet to have their emotional needs met as well as provide them with the tools to identify potential predators.

MRS. GRIFFITH (TORI GRIFFITH'S MOTHER)

[NOT A CHARACTER IN THE FILM]



Q. As a mother it must have been really difficult being on set and see your daughter doing these scenes. Maybe you can talk a little about that.

A. It was uncomfortable to watch it go on. And it was so realistically portrayed. And at the end of the day, the camera stopped and the lights went off, and it was just make-believe representing reality. But I was just riveted to the fact that this is reality for so many young girls. And I think of the mothers that are not watching their daughters on a set, and not watching their child enacting a scene of being taken by a man, but that their daughters are gone. They no longer have them, safe under their roof at night. And they wake up in the morning and they are no longer there, as a mother, my heart broke for the parents and the families. They are victims as well.

Q. What do you think is the solution to this problem?

A. I think what I'd like to see happen is awareness to keep raising. And the mass media is one of the best ways to do it. Films like Lost Girls will put it out there to the masses and sensitize the masses to this relentless, rampant disease that has society all over the world in its grips. I think raising awareness through media and shaming the appetite that is out there, is what needs to happen. Because if there weren't an appetite, there wouldn't be a supplier. This is an industry that drug lords are moving over into because it's a 150 billion dollars and growing. And I know because this is the background research we did before Tori took the role. And that was just staggering to me that drug lords are moving over to trafficking because there's so much money.

**"DID YOU KNOW ABOUT
SEX TRAFFICKING
IN THE US?"**

WHAT IS SEX TRAFFICKING?

Sex trafficking is a form of modern slavery that is pervasive throughout the world, including the United States.

Briefly, sex trafficking is a form of exploitation, involving forcing women, men and children to engage in commercial sex against their will and with coercion. Sex trafficking violates basic human rights, including the rights to bodily integrity, equality, dignity, health, security, and freedom from violence and torture.

The United Nations is more explicit in its general definition of trafficking.

'Trafficking in persons' shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, or abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments of benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

(Source: Janice G. Raymond & Donna M. Hughes. (2001). "Sex Trafficking of Women in the United States: International and Domestic Trends")

This table summarizes the key aspects of these definitions.

Elements of Sex Trafficking

Act: Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons;

Means: Threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim;

Purpose: Prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, or slavery.

- From the 2000 UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, ratified by 154 countries

Sex trafficking is an undeniably pervasive, global problem. However in the US, a vast majority of the public still considers this to be a third world issue, even as 300,000 American children are trafficked annually. In fact, victims of sex trafficking include a broad range of populations, such as homeless children and youth, children and youth in the foster care system, refugees, and LGBTQ youth.

The problem is growing and criminals are getting increasingly aggressive and targeting schools, malls and other places young children and teens congregate, as well as using internet platforms to connect, befriend and then arrange meetings, often under false identities. These children are robbed of their innocence and childhoods. Many don't survive and those that are rescued suffer severe trauma that is hard to recover from.

EYE-OPENING STATISTICS ON SEX TRAFFICKING

CAVEAT:

Researchers in the field of human trafficking agree that nearly all numbers provided by different agencies, however well-intentioned, are somewhat unreliable and vary greatly, since there is no systematic way of collecting data nor general agreement on what constitutes trafficking. However, they all agree that the problem is pervasive.

Our contention is that some numbers need to be provided in order to jumpstart awareness on this problem.

Facts from various recent reports, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* (2014) as well as the US Department of State, are terrifying. Here is a sampling.

- Trafficking women and children for sexual exploitation is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world.
- This, despite the fact that international law and the laws of 134 countries (more than 90%) criminalize sex trafficking.
- At least **20.9 million adults and children** are bought and sold worldwide into commercial sexual servitude, forced labor and bonded labor.
- About 2 million children are exploited every year in the global commercial sex trade.
- Women and girls make up **98% of victims** of trafficking for sexual exploitation.
- Roughly **293,000 American youth** are at risk of becoming victims of sex trafficking.
- The average age of children trafficked is 11-12 years old.

Reports from The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) and the Urban Institute portray other facets of the ghastly situation.



- NCMEC, which serves as the national clearinghouse for information about missing and exploited children, estimates that one in seven of the endangered runaways reported to its hotline in 2013 were likely victims of sex trafficking.

- NCMEC is authorized by Congress to operate the CyberTipline®, a national mechanism for the public and electronic service providers to report suspected child sexual exploitation. In 2014 the CyberTipline received 1.1 million reports, most of which related to:
 - Apparent child sexual abuse images.
 - Online enticement, including “sextortion.”
 - Child sex trafficking.
 - Child sexual molestation.
- A recent study by the Urban Institute aimed at ascertaining the scope of sex trafficking in eight major U.S. cities estimated that the underground commercial sex economy—which includes the sex trafficking of minors—ranged from \$39.9 million to \$290 million in each city in 2007.
- These task forces, created by the 2008 reauthorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, or TVPA, reported 1,407 suspected cases of sex trafficking of minors between January 2007 and June 2010



The full reports are found at:

- UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons:
https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Executive_summary_english.pdf
- US Department of State – Trafficking in Persons Report (2015)
<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2015/index.htm>
- Equality Now: <http://www.equalitynow.org/node/101>
- NCMEC: <http://www.missingkids.com/KeyFacts>
- Center for American Progress:
<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/report/2014/04/08/87293/3-key-challenges-in-combating-the-sex-trafficking-of-minors-in-the-united-states/>

MARKETING AND PUBLICITY

As well as promoting the film itself, we also wanted to raise awareness on the issue of trafficking -- particularly of minors. When we reached out to journalists with our Press Kit, we also forwarded recent news articles evidencing that trafficking were actively going on in the US to bring the point home. As a result we were successful in getting write-ups on Lost Girls in a number of publications you can find below:

http://www.lasplash.com/publish/Film_106/julia-verdin-lost-girls.php

<http://www.hollywoodrevealed.com/lost-girls-a-powerful-film-proves-truth-is-stranger-than-fiction/>

<http://www.thenationalstudent.com/Interviews/2016-10-23/sex-trafficking-desperately-needs-more-awareness-.html>

http://www.lasplash.com/publish/Film_106/julia-verdin-lost-girls.php

<http://www.talentmonthly.com/exclusive-interview-with-lost-girls-director-julia-verdin-i-am-a-film-buff-and-constantly-watch-movies/>

<https://www.global-shorts.net/special-mention-lost-girls-usa/>

<https://www.global-shorts.net/special-mention-lost-girls-usa/>

<http://www.flavourmag.co.uk/exclusive-5-minutes-lost-girls-director-julia-verdin/>

<http://www.flavourmag.co.uk/lost-girls-review/>

<http://letsstartwiththisone.blogspot.co.uk/2016/12/lost-girls-review.html>

<https://www.theedgesusu.co.uk/film/cinema/2016/10/10/raindance-film-festival-review-lost-girls/>

<http://vulturehound.co.uk/2016/10/let-me-come-over-and-do-your-make-up-lost-girls-short-film-review/>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/lost-girls-a-portrayal-of-child-sex-trafficking_us_57cf3ba6e4b0273330ab1c62

<https://thehollywoodtimes.net/2016/09/02/director-julia-verdins-film-lost-girls-about-sex-trafficking-of-minors-in-la-is-timely-in-light-of-the-recent-big-busts-in-la-in-the-last-2-weeks/>

<http://www.streetinsider.com/Press+Releases/LOST+GIRLS%3A+Hollywood+Stands+Up+Against+Sex+Trafficking/10499244.html>

http://www.lasplash.com/publish/Film_106/lost-girls_printer.php

<http://celebrityimages.org/celebrity/6426013/3173237>

<http://ff2media.com/blog/2017/04/01/9002/>