



# Runaway Girl: Escaping Life on the Streets, One Helping Hand at a Time

*Carissa Phelps , Larkin Warren*

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**“Riveting . . . A genuinely important book that casts the problem of sex trafficking in America into stunning, heartbreaking relief.”** (*Kirkus Reviews*)

**A School Library Journal Best Adult Book for Teens**

**A Joan F. Kaywell Award Finalist from the Florida Council of Teachers of English**

Carissa Phelps was a runner. By the time she was twelve, she had run away from home, dropped out of school, and fled blindly into the arms of a brutal pimp. Even when she escaped him, she could not outrun the crushing inner pain of abuse, neglect, and abandonment. With little to hope for, she expected to end up in prison, or worse. But then her life was transformed through the unexpected kindness of a teacher and a counselor. Through small miracles, Carissa accomplished the unimaginable, graduating from UCLA with both a law degree and an MBA. She left the streets behind, yet found herself back, this time working to help homeless and at-risk youth discover their own paths to a better life. Like the multimillion-copy bestseller *The Glass Castle*, this memoir moves us through the power of its unflinching candor and generosity.

## Runaway Girl: Escaping Life on the Streets, One Helping Hand at a Time Details

Date : Published July 2012 by Viking

ISBN : 9780670023721

Author : Carissa Phelps , Larkin Warren

Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, Biography, Biography Memoir, Adult

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# **From Reader Review Runaway Girl: Escaping Life on the Streets, One Helping Hand at a Time for online ebook**

## **Liza Wiemer says**

Carissa Phelps memoir is a heart-pounding, cautionary, painful tale of life on the streets at the tender age of twelve. This beautiful woman was repeatedly raped and abused as a girl. Yet, with the love of some incredible people, she managed to not only survive, but make something pretty incredible out of her life. With a degree in business and law, Carissa Phelps is now trying to make a difference for others. Phelps reveals an America many of us never see. It's important for our eyes to be open. We never know when it's possible to have a positive impact on others. It just takes one, and that power can change the world. Simply and honestly written, I highly recommend this novel for those who enjoy memoirs or want to understand another aspect of life in America.

I am in awe of Phelps's personal strength. Without a doubt, this book only scratched the surface of some of the pain she endured. My hope for her is that goodness comes back five hundred fold. It won't change the past, but it will enable Phelps to continue to help other children who are suffering now. Thanks for being their voice.

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## **Beth says**

Dang, this was a hard read. Unflinchingly graphic at parts, I had to skip a couple chapters in the beginning. I've met Carissa and we show her documentary to our students and engage in conversations about her life and the systemic issues surrounding her story. powerful. A reality check about how life in America is for some on the margins.

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## **Esther Bradley-detally says**

This is a must read - for many reasons. One is gripping, horrifying, exultant with bravery, and a deep portrayal of young kids on the streets, lots, desperate and painful. It's about sex trafficking in America and what happens to the thousands of kids every year in the United States who are forced to leave home.

It should be in the schools, read by everyone. It was written by Carissa Phelps and Larkin Warren, and the book has pages of resources such as [www.savinginnocence.org](http://www.savinginnocence.org), [www.htresourcesproject.com](http://www.htresourcesproject.com), [www.childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org), [www.hollyaustinsmith.com](http://www.hollyaustinsmith.com), [www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org), [www.gems-girls.org](http://www.gems-girls.org), [www.misseyy.org](http://www.misseyy.org), and over 15 pages of additional resources for Adults and examples of model programs.

If you are conscious, and want to be aware of 1,000s who are hurting, maybe if read this book, you'll have an opportunity to help someone!

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## **Cheryl says**

I like reading about when the underdog wins. This is exactly how I would describe Carissa's story. Carissa

had a lot of odds stacked against her but in the end she came out on top and is now a successful attorney and motivational speaker. Of course, the path to get where Carissa is now was not easy. To be honest, Carissa did not help the situation any by running away as much as she did. The situations where Carissa was used by men, I don't blame her for. She was only twelve. A time when young girls should be thinking about makeup and preparing for their teen years. Instead Carissa was hanging out with pimps, crack heads, and selling her body for sex. Of course, during those times, the men took advantage of Carissa and even threatened her with guns.

I thought when Carissa went to talk to the boys correctional facility and the one boy asked Carissa if she had forgiven her mother for dropping her off, that this was a really good question. I was surprised when Carissa said that no one had asked her that question yet. I honestly do not blame Carissa for her response that she can't and does not know if she will be able to. Your mother is supposed to have your back and love you and support you. Instead, Carissa's mother had her new husband's back and did not want to rock the boat of a good thing she had. Seeing Carissa's point of view, I could see why she ran away but it is still hard to read what she had to endure. I am glad that she met the right people who helped her get her life straight. This was really Carissa's story and Larkin Warren just helped to put it into words.

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## **Sue says**

Riveting.

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## **Rock Angel says**

Good info in the review:

<http://www.sfgate.com/books/article/R...>

There's a movie documentary "Carissa (2008)"

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An incredibly fast read up to her 9th grade, which brought me past 50% (~p.173). By then I felt a little out of breath, what with her big ups and downs. I do not doubt her. Her fears and baby logic was hard to fake.

It struck me how EASY it was for a girl like her to fall into serious troubles. She wasn't hardcore or bad, just rebellious, testing her boundaries, & acting out b/c she had no better outlet for her frustrations under the strain of living with a huge merged family and volatile step-dad.

Those parents she got didn't help.

Carissa's auto-bio took on a style of telling the "what" without telling the "why". She rarely touched on her inner struggles. Faced with Barbara (Cambridge assistant, individualized, alt hi school)'s offer of living in a real home, under the wings of a caring couple and people she could trust, she explained it became a battle between a girl who knew right from wrong and a girl who just didn't care. The latter won, she looked for a way to turn B down.

Yet clearly she was one who felt responsible for consequences. She cared enough to find a way to reject B w/o hurting her. She wanted to preserve that trust even tho she won't let B any closer to her.

And that's the enigma for me. Carissa dumped her adoring amigo BF (whose family opened up to her, whose home w/ mom & siblings was available to her), pushed B away. Yet she kept cultivating supportive nets for herself, long before her Jake (5-yr BF) / college days when she aggressively lined up professional mentors. She got this army guy to marry her just prior to her freshman year, for example. She kept calling for her (biological) mom even tho this woman was a colossal flake as parent.

I kept waiting for Carissa to express some bitterness, resentment (hello, mom?), antagonism (toward men?) or cynicism. But none came. It would be my struggle to understand her beyond her 9th grade. Am i missing some code between these lines that speaks to some readers (runaways?) and not to me? Ms Lauren ("Some Girls: My Life in a Harem" 2010), on the other hand, spilled the whole 9 yards inside her head. But then Ms. Lauren chose her fate as an adult.

Was it heavy editing? Can Carissa tell us how she felt? I don't know. For a reader it was unsatisfying.

As a grown-up, however, I just want to fold her into a little ball, hand pick down feathers to line a silk cocoon and rock her to sleep cooing lullabies. But Carissa never felt sorry for herself, she never made excuses. She was never coy, or indignant. She is a survivor. She uses her natural wit (in mathematics) and improvised wit (who'd ever thought of taking the qualities of an extrovert from a personality test to overcome one's own extreme introversion?) She was hard on herself and didn't expect the world to cut her any slack.

(Sudden insight: Carissa is the anti-thesis of Ms. Lauren, who's a valley girl! Carissa is a classic product of the hard-scrabbled life. For ex, with the first adult that wanted sex from her in exchange for food, it never even occurred to her to run! She was not a cheat -- even as a child. I think that's what makes her so endearing to readers.)

In reading this book, I was truck by how she seemed to describe the world in simplistic terms, not just when she told of her teenage years but well into her twenties. This is a drawback in using a personal biographer, that we couldn't get her story in her own words.

(finished ch.11)

p,102, 251

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Ch. 12 info on the DVD documentary. I finally saw the YouTube Trailer starring Carissa, her eyes bright and lit with determined optimism. What a heroine.

Ch. 13

Finally I got what I was looking for in the last 5 pages and 5 lines. She not only let go of her dad (who was never into the parenting gig) but did the impossible: she forgave her mom, even tho her mom never asked to be forgiven. As a bystander I'm not so generous. In my eyes she's not worthy.

But what a heroine.

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Other Notes:

Carissa's years on the street (age 12 - 14) would be 1990 +/- 1 or 2 years by my calc.

The other sex trafficking in America i know of is Portland's "white slavery" where girls as young as 13 was kidnapped and shipped to other major cities, or even overseas, circa 1850 - 1941.

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### **Doma Delvecchio says**

Runaway Girl: Escaping Life on the Streets, One Helping Hand At A Time, an autobiography by Carissa Phelps shines light on the possibility for hope, being given a bad situation. Carissa grew up with 11 brothers and sisters. She explained that the constant struggle for food, space and attention was apparent in the house they all had to live together in. The book starts out by Carissa's step father throwing her out of the house to go to school, she was only in second grade at the time. Her mother didn't do anything to protect the abuse that her step father caused towards her. "Mom didn't ask about my hand. She didn't seem to care that it was bandaged or that I would probably have a scar" (Phelps 6) The book leads to ore serious things in Carissa's life, such as running away from home, finding herself caught up in "the streets", and how she pulled through and became the successful woman she is today.

Personally, I prefer non-fiction over any genre. This book really caught my attention. It is alarming to know that people actually have to live the way she did. I have much respect for Carissa Phelps for sharing her story. She proved that there is hope for everyone through any life situation. The outcome of the story made it that much better. The writing was very easy to understand. Over all this was a great book to read.

This autobiography is an example of what a lot of women in the world go through. It happens in all different cultures. Some women are not as lucky as Carissa was, some never get out of the "street" life they enter. A lot of women are born into bad situations and are convinced it is how they are supposed to live. This is a feminist read, it creates a vision of only some of the issues women face in the world. After reading this book, the book "Sold" that we read in class, immediately comes to mind. The main character in sold faces the same issues that Carissa did in her life on "the streets." I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys non-fiction. It is a book filled with a lot of emotion. It is a depressing read to begin, but shows a lot of hope by the end. This book was worth the read.

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### **Stacie Wilson says**

Carissa lived a lifetime before age 14. She was saved from a hellish life or certain death because a couple of people she met took an interest in her life. Her mom was incapable of loving or caring for her children and as a result Carissa was left on her own. Somehow against all odds, she graduated from high school and law school. She is honest in her book and some parts will break your heart and I just had to skip some passages on how she was raped by strangers. Carissa is an amazing woman and she had a story to tell.

Roman 8:28

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## **Terry says**

I sooooo wanted to like this book. Her story is certainly remarkable and I think mirrors the lives of many young women in high-poverty lives. I complain sometimes about this maddening passivity in the students I work with, many of whom have very similar backgrounds to Phelps's, and I hoped that perhaps this book would give me some insight to help me overcome what I see in myself (as a teacher, if not also as a human being) as a flaw (being frustrated by "maddening passivity"). Yet this book only provided more examples of it, and I \*still\* found myself frustrated. I suppose one could argue that an adolescent girl raised in a chaotic, low-income home/neighborhood should be expected to allow herself to be acted upon rather than to assert her own agency. Yet even after being mentored into and through a joint MBA/JD program at UCLA, Phelps still seems to find herself at a loss to explain how she got to certain places in her life, whether the places are atrocious or put her as part of the 1%, so to speak.

For example, Phelps's description of how she entered into prostitution drove me BANANAS precisely because she simply did whatever anyone told her, including total strangers, and this drove me crazy, so I have to really try to find a way to understand this behavior; I was also frustrated because in the documentary related to this book, she refers to herself as "kidnapped" and I did not read her own description of what happened to support that idea, or at least the conventional definition of being kidnapped. I don't know...she just reminded me children/young adults who react purely impulsively to any given situation time and time again and never seem to think critically about their choices even when given many opportunities and help to do so, who find themselves in dangerous/violent/horrific situations and when asked how they got there, genuinely cannot seem to articulate what brought them there, even their own choices or complicity in some situations, who simply gaze back and say "I don't know." At some point people have to take responsibility for their own actions.

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## **Kathy Penny says**

It is very obvious that the author is not a writer, and that's part of the beauty of this book. You can tell that this is her story, from her words, with very little assist from the "helper" writer. Sure, it's choppy in parts, but I can't help but be amazed at someone who is the same age as me yet has overcome so much. Truly inspiring. This woman has a lot of resilience.

The resource index of organizations for runaways at the end of the book is a great added tool for librarians.

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## **Ashley Chevalier says**

Runaway Girl provides a real life account of one woman's journey from a girl on the streets, to a successful attorney, motivational speaker, and youth advocate. The book begins with a flashback, to her first week of the second grade and her abusive stepfather, and from there the story follows Carissa's journey, as she struggles to find her place in the world. By the time she's twelve she's between couches, escaping from group homes, and has done time in juvenile hall. Her struggles are brought to a new level when she's introduced into the sex industry by a drug addict named Icey, who became her pimp, and raped her. Eventually, she escapes, and spends time going between juvenile hall and the group homes they assign her to, until the law catches up to her, which turns out to be her first big break. At Wakefield, an alternative school she meets Ron, who opens new doors for her in the world of education and her views on people as a

whole. In her memoir Carissa proves that life goes on, and that no matter how many awful things have happened to you that there will always be good people to help you along the way.

Carissa portrays herself with weaknesses, she doesn't start her life as an empowered woman, she starts as a street kid, who grows into a strong, independent, and empowered woman. There is no prince charming in her story, there are platonic role models that helped her get where she needed to be. Women reading this are proud of Carissa, she doesn't hold anything against men, despite the number of horrifying encounters she's had, she recognizes the individuals for their actions, not the gender as a whole. She inspires anyone with a past that they have a future, whether that past involves the sex industry, drugs, alcoholism, or abuse, she gives the message that a positive life is always possible.

I really appreciate that Carissa gives credit to the people that helped her along the way, she understands that the help she accepted made her the person she is today, and I liked that she didn't write as if she was a one woman show. However, she skips large chunks of time in her adult life, and switches gears to her work as an activist fairly abruptly. While there is no doubt that I enjoyed her book, I often found myself reading the same things over again, though because this is non fiction that may have been unavoidable. Despite the repetition, Carissa's writing style makes the reader feel for her, you feel her fear, but you also see how rebellious she was, and you have to determine her best course of action from the point as you turn each page.

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### **Katherine says**

I thought the ending was well-done. Triggering around sexual assault and drug use. It was a tough read, but very interesting.

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### **Debbie says**

This book is a "Must Read" if you work in any way with children or young adults. I was riveted to her story from beginning to end. It's amazing how the system and her family fail her but then later has a handful of people who believe in her and she accomplishes great things. I love how her story is so painfully honest. It is horrifyingly vivid at times too.

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### **Virginia says**

PLEASE READ THIS BOOK! It is written by my dear friend, Carissa Phelps, who has survived the tragedy of human trafficking and has rebounded back into life and prepared to help others. This is a story of resilience and faith.

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### **Jillian says**

A brilliant and riveting account of the triumph of the human spirit. For her courage, her integrity and her strength, Carissa Phelps is someone to be admired.

Runaway Girl had this reader runaway with her as she (I) could not stop reading once I started.

Larkin Warren does an amazing job of telling Carissa's story, utilizing an active voice to make it seem like

it's happening now, thereby injecting a sense of urgency into the prose.

This is a must read for parents and for teachers. Ms. Phelps story demonstrates Shakespeare's contention that "honor and beauty in the owner's arms are weakly fortress'd in a world of harms>'

Ms. Phelps navigates through this "world of harms" while keeping her sense of honor, beauty and namely, her selfhood intact.

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