

## Gita

*Gita was brought to Canada as a domestic worker by persons with diplomatic status in Canada. Due to the sensitive nature of her case, the name of the country from where she was brought has been omitted.*

I was born in Sri Lanka, but moved to (country's name omitted) in 1994. I stayed there with my husband for about 7 and a half years. We had a daughter and she was just 9 1/2 months old when I left them. I had been searching for jobs and I met a diplomat who said that they could take me to Canada. They promised me that I would only be gone for three years and that I could have a one month vacation every year to travel back to visit my family. They promised me that I wouldn't have to spend anything... they were diplomatic people. But this was not what happened.

After one month in Canada, my Madam had cut off all of my connections to my husband and my daughter. Anytime that my husband tried to call me, she would say "she's not home." There was one time though, that he phoned early in the morning, 5:00, and my madam's husband answered the phone. He was a good man. I never had a long conversation with him because he was very, very busy, but I could tell by the way he said "good morning" that he was a good person. So that morning my husband asked my Mister, "Where is my wife? It's been a whole month and she didn't call or write letters..." and my Madam's husband didn't understand, he said "we gave her the address and the phone number, I don't know why she didn't call you." But what neither of them knew was that I had been asking his wife "Can I please talk to my family?" and she always refused. But my Mister came to me that day and said..."answer the phone, it's your husband." My husband was very upset. He was nervous and angry because he thought I would forget about him and my daughter, because sometimes women move away from and become Canadians by themselves. But I told him that I wanted to talk to him but my Madam wouldn't let me and I couldn't tell the truth to her husband because he is so close to his wife.

During the four months, the suffering got worse. She never let me go out of the house or talk to anyone on the phone. All I had was my Jesus- and was praying all the time that he would release me from that hell. I started talking to the gardener. One day he told me about a South Asian Woman's Centre and the Claims Office. I knew how to read English well enough to look in the yellow pages. Even after I found the number though, I couldn't call. I was so scared. Everyday when my Madam came home she checked to see if I made or received any phone calls. I could not call from inside the house and I could not go outside to use a pay-phone because all of the doors and windows had alarms. I just kept praying and praying. I wasn't a good Christian but I believed that if I became a born-again Christian Jesus

would save me. I never slept in that house. When I got to my room at 10:30 or 11:00, I'd just lay in bed with my eyes open, and at 5 o'clock in the morning I'd get up and pray until 6:30 when I started my work.

There was one day that my Madam took me to the Mountain to stay with one of her friends for three days. Her friend had three kids and I took care of them for those three days. When we left the woman gave me 60 Canadian dollars! That was the only money that I had. My madam hadn't paid me any salary, and I kept insisting that they pay me so I could send money to my family. One day I cried to the Mister, I said "Please, send my money or open an account!" On Monday, September 2nd, I think... Yes, September 2nd, he opened the account and put in three months salary. I don't know how my husband survived without it. He had lost his job because he had to stay home with our daughter. He called to tell me that he got the money and that he wanted me to come home. But I told him: "I don't have anybody to help me in Montreal, and I don't know the Canadian rules." I tried to watch the news to learn about the situations in Canada but my Madam would always yell at me "Why do you watch the news all the time." I was so scared. After those four months, I asked her to send me back to (countries name omitted). Only then did I realize that it would be impossible for me to return.

She had cancelled all of my papers because she wanted to keep me as a slave with her forever. Even if they were going to move, I would have to move too, and I could never see my family again. She was smart. She knew that I have only my husband and my daughter- no one else, so she was trying to break that connection. One day, the Mister said to my Madam "Take this girl outside, don't keep her in the house all the time." So she took me to the supermarket. I had my \$60.00 with me and when my madam wasn't looking I asked the cashier quietly to give me calling cards, but not to let my madam see that I was buying them. The lady tried, but my Madam saw and made a big fuss in the store. She screamed like hell in front of everybody, and I was crying. I tried to tell her that I just wanted to call my husband. She took me home and after arguing with her husband, who insisted that one card was harmless, she had to let me keep the card... but they didn't know that I bought 2 cards for \$20. After I used up all of the money on the first card, they thought the problem was solved.

One morning... November 22nd or 21st, she went to drive her son to school. She told me that she would be back in 5 minutes... So I waited 5 minutes, then 10 and she still wasn't back, so I called the number for the South Asian Woman's Centre. I was so scared. Hitu answered the phone, and after I told my story, she told me that

I had to leave the house without taking anything (except my clothes) and to take a bus and the metro. "I don't even know where I am living!" I cried to Hitu. I could not take the bus. So, we finally decided that I should take a taxi. I had a taxi phone number hidden on the inside of an envelope in my room. I was smart to write it on the inside because my Madam always came into check my room and looked at my jewelry, and I didn't want her to see the number. So I called the taxi person and they said that they would arrive in 5 minutes, and I said "no, come in 2!" And within 2 minutes I heard a horn beeping outside. I grabbed my clothes, but they were all summer clothes, and I went to the car. On our way we passed by the embassy and I saw my Madam's driver! I put my head down and pretended to tie my shoes. The taxi driver knew that I was upset and asked where I was going, and I told him that I was going on vacation for a month. I didn't want him to be suspicious. When we got to the address that I'd given him... there was Hitu waiting for me. Hitu gave me a winter coat and warm clothes and took me to the Police Station.

At first they said that they couldn't help me because I didn't have any of my papers. But Hitu insisted that I needed their help. I requested that they would get some things from my Madam's house... things like my winter clothes, my passport, my account card, contract paper and work permit. But they could only get my bank card and my passport- and suggested that I try to just forget about the other things. Madam Sadeqa let me stay at her house for three days, until I could go to a Pilipino shelter called PINAY. There they told me that I could stay for 2 or 3 months but no more than that. Soon after, Hitu taught me how to use the Metro. One day I got a call saying I had to go to the police station in Outremont. When I went there, that's the first time I realized that I had been living in Outremont! At the police station, they told me that my Madam and the Mister said that I stole their jewelry from them... I was scared, I never stole. I told them that I was good, that I was guided by God, and if I ever do something bad- I crucify Jesus again- so I don't do anything wrong. I told them why would I steal their jewelry? I have my own. I was wearing my 13 pound wedding necklace, and I told them that it was mine and that even if I did have jewelry, I don't know how to sell it. At that moment, I felt like God was talking through me. Then they believed me- they really believed me. "We even have to love our enemy..." the bible says so, so I never would have taken anything from them. What I wanted more than anything, and I told them this, was to close that horrible chapter of my life and start a fresh life in Canada.

I wanted to cancel my diplomat visa, and Hitu came with me to tell the people at immigration that I am not a diplomat person. On February 17th they cancelled it and told me that I could claim refugee status if I wanted to. On September 6th though,

my case was rejected. Hitu was so helpful, Hitu and Madam Sadeqa- Hitu even helped me to find a legal aid lawyer so that I could appeal the decision. I was happy during this month, I had the strength to work and was able to cancel my welfare. I just kept praying that God would guide me in Canada. Like when Jesus saved me... I was dead in my Madam's house, but I prayed and I was saved. By the end of September, all of my forms went through and I got my work visa.

Since October, I've been working in a factory. I only get paid a little bit but I believe I can manage myself. My church has helped me a lot too. Now, I can say that I'm happy. I can smile. I send money to my husband and my daughter. It is hard for them and he wants me to come home. He has had to be a mother and a father and is also trying to find a job. I want to go back too, I told him- but he would have to sponsor me- and I have so many people helping me here now. They gave me a lot of furniture and a microwave. But my husband says that my daughter started calling everybody "mom"- and I'm not even dead- I'm alive! I wanted to go back to my husband and my daughter. It is so hard. I wake up early and stay until late- I have to pay for my phone and food- it's \$450-500 a month. I never buy clothes- no- I just send the rest of the money to my husband. When I got my first cheque, it was only \$200 because there were many false taxes taken off of it. Hitu helped me. She talked to the lady and told her that I needed the real check and the lady agreed. Hitu has helped me so much. When I first was at the shelter with her, she even kept my whereabouts secret from the police to protect me. If I am so busy and don't call for a few weeks, then Hitu or Madam Sadeqa call to see if I'm okay. I really appreciate them. They made everything free for me. Even when my husband faxed my birth and marriage certificates to the SAWCC, and I called to say that I received them- Hitu let me call for free. I want to see my husband but I don't want to go back to (countries name omitted) and my husband and I both don't want to go back to Sri Lanka. I would like to bring them to Canada. I talked to my pastor and he said that if my story might help someone- then it's worth telling. Now I just have to keep smiling, otherwise it would be very hard.

*Gita can no longer enter the country where her husband and daughter are due to the cancellation of her status by her former employers. She is now awaiting a verdict on her refugee claimant status, and a time when she will be able to be reunited with her husband and daughter.*