



## Trafficking in Women and Children

---

### STORIES

#### RACHEL

Rachel, a 12-year-old Albanian girl from Korca, a city near the Greek border, believed her new husband Stephan when he vowed to love and care for her. She had just dropped out of school and was working in a cigarette factory. When Stephan, who was 29, suggested that they move abroad for a better life, they got married, and moved to Italy.

Soon after they arrived, Stephan asked Rachel to work on the street as a prostitute. “I didn’t know what prostitution meant,” says Rachel, now 15. “I thought it was only a job. I didn’t know what kind of job it was.”

Her husband became her pimp, and she worked on a highway, seeing up to 10 clients a night to earn \$250. “If I didn’t earn that money, he would beat me,” she recalls.

Rachel is not alone. An estimated 30,000 Albanians are working abroad as prostitutes. Most of them are teenage girls who were coerced, deceived and kidnapped, frequently by Albanian pimps and traffickers who are known to the family.



#### ELENA

Elena, a single mother, lived in Russia after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Before the breakup she had a good job and was able to earn an adequate living for herself and her two daughters. After the breakup, jobs became scarce for women and she was unable to make a living. She had heard that men from the US and Europe were looking for educated Russian women to marry. Through an internet dating agency, she started to communicate with Ed from the US. After several months, they met, spent several weeks dating and were married. Once Elena and her daughters arrived in the United States, she was told that she and her daughters were to live separately from Ed in a basement apartment. Ed began to drink heavily and openly, many times forcing himself on Elena. He also forced her to pose naked for him and she discovered he was posting such photos of her on pornographic web sites. When she tried to refuse, he told her –“I know you are proud of your ability to play the piano,” and threatened to break her fingers. Then, she realized it was likely that he would begin to take pictures of her daughters to post on web sites that deal in child pornography. She knew she had to get help.

Ultimately Elena found a lawyer who helped her divorce Ed and regularize the immigration status of herself and her daughters. Unfortunately, they were unable to stop Ed going to the internet to find another bride to start the cycle all over again.

**TRAN THI BE**

Six-year-old Tran Thi Be was dead tired, but had to keep running after people on the street and ask them to spare some change. “Please, help my blind mother,” she urged passersby, while an obviously underfed woman sat beside her.

Despite Be’s efforts begging all day in downtown Ho Chi Minh City, she was unable to earn the sum expected by her ‘blind mother’ who is actually not her mother at all, but her boss for-the-day.

Be is just one among hundreds of children trafficked annually to this southern Vietnamese city to fill a swelling army of drug vendors, prostitutes and beggars.

She fell into the hands of a child trafficker two years ago and has become his ‘asset’ ever since. Her keeper ‘manages’ a dozen children, ranging from one to 12 years of age, whom he rents out to professional beggars looking to improve their earning prospects.

**MARIE OF MONTREAL**

Regarding Marie (fictional name), 18 years old. She was abducted in Montreal and used sexually for two and a half months by up to twenty men a day. She finally devised a plan of escape just before being sent to China for further trafficking.

Today she is suffering post-traumatic stress and experiences fear, anxiety, nightmares and flashbacks. Physically, she has syphilis, loss of memory and appetite, and has had two major surgeries: on intestines and for displaced ovaries.

Emotionally, she is suspect of everyone, has little interest for ordinary activities. She is prone to anger, short temper reactions, lack of concentration and trusts no one.

She has been in therapy for one and a half years with an SNJM psychologist.

**ELIZA**

Eliza is a 14-year-old Mexican girl. She was working cleaning hotel rooms when a man, Rogerio Cardena, approached Eliza’s parents, telling them about a well-paying job he could get for Eliza doing the same work north of the border in the United States.

Eliza was eager to go. Her parents were reluctant. But the smooth-talking man said Eliza would be “in good hands”.

Eliza was taken to Houston, Texas and from there to Orlando, Florida. It was then that Eliza was told she would have to work as a prostitute until she paid off the \$2,200 debt for her passage out of Mexico.

From the Reader’s Digest, April 2001



## PERLITA

Perlita was born in a small town in the Philippines that relies on copra and fishing as its main economic activities. Born into a large family, Perlita started but never completed her degree in business administration. She ended up working as a secretary for one year in Manila, before leaving for Hong Kong where she was able to secure employment as a domestic worker through her aunt. She ended up working in Hong Kong for 10 years for the same employer. Actually, she worked for two families in one household. Given the proximity of Hong Kong to the Philippines, she was able to return frequently for visits with her family. On one of these visits, she married a Filipino man. After one week of living together, she returned to work in Hong Kong. She was not able to return to the Philippines for two years. At that time, she hoped she could stay permanently in the Philippines with her husband. However, after one month he abandoned her.

She returned to Hong Kong to work after the failure of her marriage, never changing her marital status on her immigration papers from single. In Hong Kong, she was encouraged by her sister, a domestic worker in Canada, to submit her name to a “friendship” office in British Columbia. She was given the name of a man, Keith. They began corresponding. At that time, Keith was already in his 50s. Through their correspondence, Perlita learned that Keith was a Canadian citizen of German descent. Perlita only found out later that Keith had been married four times before and already had four children.

Perlita continued to correspond with Keith. She was also encouraged by her sister, who arranged for her to work for a Canadian family, so Perlita could meet Keith. Perlita’s application to come to Canada under the Live-in Caregiver program (LCP) was successful and she immigrated to Canada. Perlita hoped she could eventually obtain Canadian citizenship. She continued to declare her marital status as single on her immigration documents.

Immediately, she found employment caring for two young children. She worked for them for 21 months, falling three months short of the mandatory 24-month, live-in requirement under the LCP. The reason she fell short of the 24-month requirement was because Perlita was already eight months pregnant by Keith. In fact, after her first year with her employer, she had moved in with Keith. Perlita knew this would jeopardize her status under the LCP, but Keith insisted she live with him. She gave birth to a daughter two weeks after leaving her employment as a domestic worker.

One month after the birth of her daughter, Perlita and Keith were married. Perlita never returned to work because Keith would not let her work outside the home. Keith insisted he could provide for them through his business. Ironically, this business was registered in Perlita’s name. Keith had registered the business in her name even while she was under the LCP, as his previous business had shut down because of tax evasion charges levied against him by Revenue Canada (now known as the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency). Perlita would later find out that Keith twice tried to register the business in her name, but the application was rejected because she was not present. However, Keith traveled to another town where he successfully got around the rules and registered the business under her name despite her absence.



Perlita finally obtained landed immigrant status as the spouse of a Canadian citizen. This same year her first marriage in the Philippines was annulled. Perlita gave birth to her second daughter.

This was also the year that the grave physical abuse of Perlita began. Even before their marriage, Perlita had felt emotionally and verbally abused by Keith. He controlled all aspects of her life—her mobility, her access to friends and even her access to money. He would verbally and emotionally demean her in front of her friends. This control had already led to a suicide attempt while still employed as a domestic worker. But now, the abuse escalated to physical attacks. She was kicked in the back and hit twice in the face, leaving bruises. He held a gun to her head and threatened to shoot her. In one horrifying incident, he pressed his knee against her chest, cutting off her breathing—in full view of the children.

Like many other abused women, Perlita attempted to leave her husband on many occasions. She sought refuge with her sister and friends, but the fear that he would report her to Immigration always prevented her from going through with her decision to leave him. Perlita knew Keith could give information to Immigration that could have her deported. Keith knew she was previously married in the Philippines, but that she had declared her status as single. Keith knew they had gotten married before her first marriage was annulled. Keith knew she had lived outside her employer's home while still under the LCP. Keith also knew the business would show up as registered in her name, while she was still under the LCP. Perlita felt trapped. Every aspect of her life, including her options to flee, were being controlled by Keith.

Perlita called a women's organization one time for help. An appointment was set up for her to speak with a counselor, but she backed out, because she feared a reprisal from Keith. Eventually, just as they were about to move to another province, Perlita took the children with her to a shelter. Perlita describes the moment almost like an epiphany. She knew in the deepest part of herself, that if she did not take this chance, she would never be able to leave Keith.

Perlita sought help from the Philippine Women Centre. They advised her to move in order to ensure her safety and that of the children. She had heard about the Centre's involvement in Alice's case, another woman who was facing deportation for failing to declare her marriage in the Philippines.

Perlita was distraught when she first came to the PWC. During her last telephone call to Keith, he said he had already made good on his threat to report her to Immigration. Perlita knew from her counselors that an immigration officer was looking for her.

Besides the problems with Immigration, Perlita also knew her husband did not remit anything to Revenue Canada for the business that was in her name. But, most of all, Perlita was concerned about keeping custody of her two daughters. For now, Perlita's story has a happy ending. The PWC assisted in finding a good lawyer to represent her in the family law proceeding. She was granted sole custody of her two daughters. The court took into account Keith's record of abuse against his previous four wives. This record of abuse was bolstered by the testimony of Keith's own children from the earlier marriages. She is now in hiding, for her protection and that of her children.

But will Keith's next wife be so lucky?