

A R A N I ' S V O I C E P R O J E C T

I am not forgotten...

The voice of victims from crying out for justice and freedom

"I stand in the "window" in one of the countries I always dreamt to visit one day. The Netherlands. It appears so beautiful and picturesque when I have seen the post cards growing up. Many others like me surround me from Bulgaria, Romania, and Moldova, Ukraine. We are so many; it's hard to know everyone's name. We are so different, yet, we have one thing in common: the desperate desire not to be forgotten. We have become helpless, hopeless, dying to be heard, wanting to be seen. Not as the sex objects in the 'windows' but as women who have names, but live without dignity, filled with shame.

My memories, no matter how sad they seemed while growing up in Veliko Turnovo, Bulgaria, are now my only escape from this dark reality; somehow my past appears much better and I wish I could go back in time. I wish I could see my older sister, who died from leukemia in December 2008. I wish, I could hug my other 8 younger brothers and sisters; I wish I could tell them that I love them and that I will help them financially so they don't end up like me some day. I am not in visible chains, but I am not my own. I was bought, for a small amount, perhaps not much more than 500 Euros that was given to my mother; an arranged marriage transpired, just as I had heard of many others who grow up, like me, in the Roma culture.

Since I was a young child, I was brought up to believe, that it was my destiny to be married to someone I did not know, did not love, and find happiness with that man. My arranged marriage was going to help my poor family.

In the beginning of August 2012, I was still living my 'normal' life. Two men came to our door, introduced themselves as distant relatives and wanted to take me with them as a bride. At first, I didn't want to go. Yet, I felt guilty that I was being selfish; I thought that perhaps this would be the only opportunity I will ever have to help my family. After all, my poor mother was unemployed the last 7 years, and since July 2012 she has been sweeping the streets for only 150 BGN a month. We barely had any food or good clothing. I attended the Mentally Disabled School when growing up because they were giving us free food each day. It wasn't until recently, when I turned 18, that I began to learn how to read and write better.

Since the day I accepted the marriage, I can't remember much. All I know is that I left Bulgaria 3 days after my arranged marriage for a small town in Holland. Later I found out that I was in Arnhem. My future husband said that he has a window cleaning business. I was excited. Finally, I would live a better life and would have my own family.

It didn't take me long to realize that I was tricked. I had not found true love; everything was a lie. I was sold, like others, especially from my country and Romania, who are brought to Holland as sex-trafficking victims. I overheard that 76% of us who are trafficked come from these two Eastern European Countries.¹ Most of the time, no one can find us. Prostitution here is legal and from the outside, we look like everyone else who prostitutes here by choice. Some of us are forced to sleep with 40 or more men per day.¹ Sometimes I lose count. Some of the pimps make €2,000 on average per day, from each of us.¹ Of course, we don't see any of the money. We are 'their prisoners.'"



Story Written by C.D.
Changing a Generation and Rani Hong
at www.ranisvoice.org ; Seattle, WA

