

OF FAITH AND HEALING

The life lessons of Sarah Balabagan

by MARIE PAULINE GUIUAN



Sarah Balabagan Photo by Alex Cabansagan

SARAH Balabagan first made headlines around the world in 1994 as the under-aged Filipina domestic helper in the United Arab Emirates who killed the employer attempting to rape her.

had 14 young mouths to feed, she learned to understand at an early age that life was difficult. Her father was an alcoholic and a gambler who left the care of his children solely to his wife.

Her story awakened the global Filipino community to the unfortunate plight of overseas contract workers and was eventually made into a controversial film in 1997.

Of her 14 siblings, only seven survived, as they were too poor to afford medical treatment whenever one of the children got sick. Sarah was the fourth out of the seven. "We had no money so we could only go to the town's faith healer," she said. "We just waited to see if the kid would survive."

Now, 15 years later, Balabagan sits inside a downtown café in San Francisco, sipping coffee and talking about her eventful life, dressed in a trendy red cotton blouse, slim black pants and high heels for her next singing engagement.

Because of poverty, Sarah was only able to make it to the fifth grade before deciding that she had to work to help make ends meet for her family. She started working at her aunt's store.

Brushing her long black hair away from her face, she admits to being a very different person from the girl who languished in an Arab jail a decade and a half ago.

At that time, it had become increasingly common for minors to work as domestic helpers in Middle Eastern countries, even though the legal age for working abroad was 24. Work agencies would recruit teenagers through deceitful contracts that required them to work for months, even years, at a time.

With three children, several album recordings and scheduled visits to different churches throughout California to speak and sing about her newfound faith in Christ, she has indeed come a long way.

"I applied without my mom's knowledge so I could help my mom and siblings," Balabagan said. Her mom eventually found out, but by then, it was too late. At the age of 14, Balabagan had

"I've always been a brave person," she said in Tagalog. "I'm not ashamed of my story. I was jailed because I defended myself from bad people, and seeing how people react to me now, I know they understand that."

Within weeks, her employers—particularly the elderly father—began making sexual advances, giving her lewd signals and

The family she ended up with was composed of five men, with her main employer being the father of the household, 85-year-old Almas Mohammed Al-Baloushi, who was either divorced or widowed. Sarah also had to do work for his four sons who all lived with him.

"I thought I was safe with him since he was older," she said.

But she was mistaken. Within weeks, her employers—particularly the elderly father—began making sexual advances, giving her lewd signals and

► PAGE A21

How would you like to give yourself a nice raise?

Join Our Vocational Nursing Program



Bring a friend to join with you, get additional \$250 off!

Join our next VN class and get a ***FREE LAPTOP*** Must bring this ad to avail of this promotion

GLENDALE LOCATION OPENING SOON!

BENEFITS OF HOMESTEAD:

- Small classes
Individual attention
Computer for each Student
Experienced instructors
Free NCLEX review

Classes are forming now. So hurry! Remember, we only have a limited number of openings for the class. You can take either the day or evening classes and keep your present job.

OTHER PROGRAMS

- CNA
Medical Assisting
Pharmacy Technician

Special Offer! FREE LAPTOP! CALL US NOW TO MAKE YOUR APPOINTMENT



HOMESTEAD SCHOOLS 23844 Hawthorne Blvd., Suite 200 Torrance, CA 90505

(310) 791-9975 • (800) 253-0088

HomesteadSchools.com

Now Accepting Applications for our GLENDALE Location PLEASE CALL GEORGE FOR MORE INFORMATION!

TRUST. EXPERIENCE.



IMMIGRATION

- Family-Based Petitions
Employment-Based Petitions / PERM
Removals / Deportations
Consular Processing
PERSONAL INJURY
Car Accidents
Slip and Fall
Wrongful Death

18 years of serving the Filipino-American community Admitted in California & District of Columbia

LAW OFFICES OF ARNEL JALBUENA

A Professional Corporation 3250 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 950 Los Angeles, CA 90010 | Tel: 213.487.8600

Nakaka-sira ng ulo.



Having your car damaged can leave you devastated. Having your home destroyed is even worse. With our award winning 24/7 HelpPoint® claims service, you can rest assured that one of our highly trained professionals will be there to help you take care of your claim every step of the way.

24/7 HelpPoint Features:

Auto

- We help you through the claims process every step of the way.
We help you arrange towing (if needed).
We help you secure a rental vehicle (if needed).
We help you schedule a repair date that is convenient for you.

Home

- We help you through the claims process every step of the way.
We help you with alternative living arrangements (if needed).
We assist you in getting emergency residential repairs.
We review your next steps and questions.



FARMERS

farmers.com

AUTO • HOME • LIFE • BUSINESS

Speak to a Farmers agent today. Call 1-800-327-6377.