

The life lessons of Sarah Balabagan

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 trying to solicit sex from her when she was alone with them. Al-Baloushi tried to give her cash so that she would sleep with him, while his eldest son would come home drunk and call her to him while he was undressing. When she refused his advances, Al-Baloushi would beat her.

"I just tried to avoid being alone with them," she said, shuddering.

After enduring the harassment for a month and a half, she went and complained to the work agency that had brought her there. But instead of helping out, they encouraged her to give in to her employers' wishes.

"*Wala akong kakampi* (No one was on my side)," she said. "It was like hell."

She tried running away to another Filipina domestic helper nearby whose employers were willing to take her in, but Al-Baloushi found her and threatened to sue the family she was staying with. She had no recourse other than to return to her place of work.

Things just started to get worse from there. On July 19, 1994, Sarah was doing chores in Al-Baloushi's room when he suddenly attacked her with a knife, trying to rape her. They struggled over the knife for a while, causing Sarah to get stabbed several times. Eventually, she gained control of the weapon and stabbed her employer to death.

When the police came, Sarah instantly confessed to the crime, saying she had acted in self-defense. Numb with shock, Sarah was unable to cry even as she was interrogated.

"I saw no other Filipinos and I felt so alone," she said. "Thank God I survived." The only time she was able to feel the full weight of her emotions was at the hospital and a Filipina nurse examined her.

Surprisingly, Al-Baloushi's family expressed no hatred toward her. "They knew what he was capable of doing, and that he was wrong," she said.

Sarah spent the next two years in the Al-Ain Central Jail as both Arab and Philippine authorities

examined her case. The chief of police's wife was Filipina. She immediately contacted the Philippine embassy when she heard about Sarah's confession. Within days, Sarah's story was brought to national attention.

"I received lots of letters of support," Sarah said. "I also got lots of support from other Filipino women who were in the jail."

In 1995, a court ruled she was guilty of manslaughter and that she was a victim of rape. She was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. However, the prosecution appealed the verdict, and months later, a second Islamic court ruled that there was no evidence of rape, sentencing Sarah to death by firing squad.

But an international outcry and defense campaign led to a third trial, after which her sentence was reduced to a year's imprisonment, 100 lashes and the payment of the equivalent of 1 million Philippine pesos in blood money to the victim's family. A Filipino businessman named William Gatchalian helped in the

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