

Christian Woman Trafficked Multiple Times as ISIS Sex Slave

Rita, a Christian woman from the Iraqi town of Qaraqosh, was 26 when Islamic State invaded her town and took her captive. She was sold and bought four times as a sex slave before she was freed in 2017 and reunited with her father in April this year, almost four years since she was taken captive.

Although she had heard that Islamic State militants had entered Mosul, she was not aware that they were heading towards her home town, Qaraqosh (also known as Bakhdida), and other villages in the area.

When she arrived in Erbil, taxi drivers refused to take her to Qaraqosh as they said IS had arrived there. However, she was determined and travelled on. Even the Kurdish forces (Peshmerga) could not stop her at the checkpoints she passed, although they warned her it wasn't safe.

When she arrived, she said she did not notice much of a difference, but then she saw people were leaving. Her neighbors told her that Islamic State militants were on their way. As her father was old, she did not want to leave him, so they could not flee.

Traumatized

Slowly the Peshmerga lost control over the territory and Islamic State moved in. The militants started to enter houses, breaking down doors, and from a speaker in the mosque told everyone to come out of hiding. They searched people for valuables and other belongings and brought two buses for the elderly men and women.

They separated Rita, another woman and a little boy and girl from the rest, and took Rita to Mosul. They gave her a new name, Maria, and she was sold on the sex-slave market.

Her first owner was an Iraqi IS militant. Rita was terrified and, in shock, said she couldn't focus on what was happening around her. Instead she said she moved around as if in a dream. It made her owner angry and he insulted her.

There was also a Yazidi girl in the house. Shatha, 14, was bought by the same man and he raped both Rita and the girl. They were held in a room and forced to watch videos of IS members killing people. One day he made them watch a video, showing IS militants beheading Shatha's brother.

Rita said she was so traumatized that her face could not show fear. When her owner asked her if she was scared, she replied: "I am afraid of no one but God."

After six months she was sold to another IS member, a Saudi man in Syria, where she was emotionally and physically tortured by his Moroccan wife, who, Rita said, had psychological issues. She would beat Rita until blood would pour out of her nose and the wounds on her head. The woman insulted her and kept her without food, except for bread and water.

Birth Control Pills

After four months Rita was moved from Raqqa, northern Syria, to Abu Kamal, a city near the Iraqi border, where she suffered for another 16 months and was then moved to Deir ez-Zor, 130km northwest. During that time she was sold to a Syrian man.

IS members were buying her from her owners for sexual use and for services for themselves and others too. In addition, they forced the girls to use birth-control pills, as well as to have an abortion when they became pregnant. Girls aged 9 were raped and sold for between U.S. \$6,000 and \$15,000, she said.

Rita was forced to read the Quran and was sometimes threatened that they'd kill her if she did not become a Muslim. According to Rita, IS militants see women as goods that they can buy and sell and whom you can torture for disobedience. Once a woman from Kobani was reportedly punished through the removal of her ovaries.

In September 2017, the Syrian Democratic Forces launched a military operation to oust IS from eastern Syria. When they liberated Deir Ezzor, the largest city in the region, she was finally freed, along with many others held by the militants.

Rita was taken to a safe area, to Qamishli, a city in north-eastern Syria on the border with Turkey. There she received treatment and, with help from the Syriac Women's Union, has been able to slowly start experiencing healing for her trauma.

It took her a month to get to the point where she could take off her veil without fearing repercussions, she said.

When she was reunited with her father, almost four years since she was taken captive, she said it was like "a dream."

This article was published to coincide with the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict.

**Compiled from interviews given to local Arabic media.*