

The story of Siti

My name is Siti, I come from Surabaya, East Java. and I came to the Netherlands in 1999. I have three children and when I left my country my oldest son was 11 years old, and my two daughters, who are twins, were 9 years old. In Indonesia I had a job as accountant in a boutique and my husband was a programmer in a Japanese company.

But then my husband had an accident when he was bringing our daughter to school on a motorbike. He was hit by a truck, his hip was entirely broken and we could not pay for the operation and medical treatment. Because it was not an accident at work but on the road, the place where he worked would not pay for the medical treatment. I was desperate because we did not have the money to pay for my husband's medication and to finance the daily needs of our children.

The accident was in 1998, and 6 months later I saw an advertisement in the newspaper that there was a job vacancy to work at Heineken in Rotterdam with a salary of 1000 guilders a month. There was an address and telephone number, so that one could contact the agency. There was already talk among my colleagues at work that if you want to get a good salary then you have to go abroad and find work there. So, then I went to the employment agency (in Surabaya)

I was interviewed and asked why I wanted to work abroad. I had to pay 2 million rupiahs advance money for the interview. After the interview, I then had to pay 14 million rupiahs, so I sold our motorbike to be able to pay the costs. At that time I did not know that the procedure was actually quite difficult to get a proper work visa. And even for a tourist visa, one was interviewed at the embassy in Surabaya.

Finally, I went to the Netherlands in March, 1999. At Schiphol airport I was picked up by the friend of the agent, whose name is mr H. I had to pay 550 guilders to pay for the transport and the room. There were two other male migrants from Surabaya who were also with me. From Schiphol we went straight to Rotterdam Central and was picked up by mr H who then took us to Schiedam where mr G lived.

But as the others had small rooms to sleep in, I was brought to the bedroom of mr G. I immediately protested and started shouting and threatened to call the police. He then stopped harassing me, because there were the two other migrants who came with me and they came out of their (small) rooms to support me.

In the end mr G found a place for me to work. He said there was a woman who wanted to give her a job in a restaurant in Zeeland and that I would also get a place to stay. So, I went there together with another migrant who travelled with me from Indonesia. The person said that he would take care so that we can work comfortably. At first I worked as a child minder but was told also to deliver the newspaper/advertisements in the

morning at 5 am. After only 2 days, I was treated badly treated and sexually assaulted by a male boss. After running away from the house I then got a new job in Zeeland, in a food stall with very little salary but working from 11am to 2am (worked in the morning cleaning, lunch at 13pm cooking until 20pm/night at 21pm, only lasted 1 month due to being treated badly by my boss's son. His wife had left him and he had a small child. After finishing work at the restaurant at 8 in the evening, I had to iron clothes at the house of the restaurant owners' son. But after finishing with my ironing the son started to hold my arm and touch me. So I immediately ran to go back to Rotterdam, quite late at night. I called my friend (with a Nokia that I had) who was working in Rotterdam and that friend picked me up. And I was brought to Mr G's house again.

When I returned to Rotterdam (fled at 12 at night to Rotterdam). I had to sleep in a room where 4 other people also slept (all of them male migrants) and from one of the migrants I got the opportunity for another job, this time in a shop which was also a restaurant in Dordrecht and I worked there for 2 years from 9 in the morning until about 10 in the evening.

But one day, when my female boss was on vacation it happened again. On a Saturday in the evening, the husband started physically touching and hugging me. He started taking off his trousers but then I said I was having menstruation so he stopped. The next morning at 5 a.m. I ran away and walked towards the Rotterdam train station. I was crying while walking.

But then a car stopped and a man asked me what was the matter.

"Don't worry, don't cry, you can go to the police. But I can take you to my friend, K who has a Javanese wife" said this person, who I learned was called Mr D. So, since 2001, I became a babysitter for his children. Two nights at mr K's house, three nights at mr D's. The two days off, I stayed in the boarding room of mr K's in-laws' house.

But now that the children are grown up, I had to find other work. In the end by Mr D, I was given a job to take care of his aged mother who was sick and needed daily care. I was allowed to stay at his (empty) house in Rotterdam during the week end (by paying 700 euros a month), but during the week I had to stay in Gouda and sleep with the mother (who I call 'Oma'). And she is a very difficult person. She has trouble sleeping. It is very difficult for me to not do what she tells me, because I am dependent on mr D. I am allowed to work 3 days a week at his friends' house 3 pm. But at 4 pm I have to return to D's mother's house until evening. I get paid 15 Euros per hour. I have difficulty sleeping at night because I am often woken up by her. And quite often I have to sleep next to her so this makes it difficult for me to sleep soundly. Even though mr D himself helps me to find other jobs, outside the hours I have to take care of 'Oma', it is not easy to get some freedom for myself, although I am still doing much work for other migrants and am part of a Migrant Union (IMWU).