

Nanny behind diplomatic human-trafficking allegations tells story



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Ottawa police say they arrested a prowler over the weekend. *PAT MCGRATH / OTTAWA CITIZEN*

She is small, slight woman. Her voice is barely audible at times as she describes chain of events that have brought her to where she is now.

She was a nanny caring for children in the Philippines, and she says it was for them that she made decision to come to this country. But police are now treating what happened upon her arrival as a case of human

trafficking. Charges were announced this month against Bueneflor Cruz, 44, and Robert Cruz, 45, — a diplomatic couple who have since left this country. The allegations and charges against them have not been tested in court, and they are considered innocent unless proven guilty.

In a recent interview arranged by her lawyer, the nanny answered questions for the Citizen on condition that she not be identified.

The 26-year-old says she was held in a strange house without her consent and threatened with physical harm if she returned to the Philippines. She said she hopes to stay in Ottawa and work again as a nanny. But for now, she's living in a shelter where she is safe. But she has no job, no money and no passport, a young woman stranded thousands of kilometres from her family and afraid to go home.

It all began well, the nanny said. In the fall of 2008 she went to work in the Philippines for the Cruz family, who had two children: One a year and a half old, the other about nine.

"They are nice when I am there (in the Philippines)," she said. And after a few months they invited her to move with them to Canada, so that they could work in the embassy here.

She didn't want to leave her family for several years with no chance to go home and visit, but the couple said she was the only nanny able to take care of their children. For the sake of the children, she says, she finally agreed.

"And when I get here, my first time here, they are not nice."

In Canada they lived in a modest house in Orléans, but this is where everything changed, the nanny alleges. "They (were) always angry to me, using bad words."

"My employer told me if I do something bad, if I talk to anyone about my situation inside the house, I'm going to get hurt from them." She alleges she was working every day from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.

She was earning about \$150 a month in the beginning, eventually \$250 a month, but she saved nothing "because I am always sending money to my family, helping them."

She had a few friends here — other nannies from the Philippines — and she wasn't allowed to have these friends over to her employers' house to visit.

One day she invited a friend over and her employers came home from the embassy and found them talking outside. Her employers fired her immediately, she says, and she alleges they forced her to go to a house where a Chinese couple kept her from getting away.

The nanny said she didn't know these people. The woman in this house followed her everywhere, sleeping in the same room with her, even following her into the bathroom.

"My employer told them to watch me," she said. They tried to stop her from going outside because "they are thinking I'm going to run away to escape."

She got away because her friends had already given her contact information for Julie Taub, an Ottawa lawyer who now represents her. She contacted Taub, and has since begun the process of applying for refugee status here.

The rest of her story still isn't clear. She began to cry into a handkerchief after describing the fear that she will be hurt if she goes home to the Philippines, and could not continue the interview.

"I'm afraid to go back there," she said.

Earlier this month a reporter asked Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird whether more could have been done to lay charges against the couple who employed the nanny. Baird said they had diplomatic immunity and there was no power to hold them.

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