

Panida was trafficked from her home in Thailand and sold as a prostitute in Malaysia. Based on an IJM investigation, Malaysian police were able to rescue Panida before she was sexually abused. IJM reunited Panida with her mother in Thailand where she is able to finish school.



Panida*

Panida, a 14-year-old girl from a rural area in the Northern Thai province of Chiang Rai, had just finished her 8th grade studies and wanted to devote her summer break to earning some extra money. Since the passing of her father, Panida's mother, was raising her. However, Panida's mother had contracted AIDS and providing for Panida was increasingly difficult. As the disease progressed, the small family was quickly losing the ability to survive.

During the summer break, a local man approached Panida and promised in vague terms a job that after four months would provide more than enough money to make Panida and her mother financially stable. Desperate and trusting the promise of a good return, Panida decided to accompany this man to her new workplace. He then lured both Panida and another local girl away from Chiang Rai into southern Thailand and through a border checkpoint to Malaysia.

Panida didn't know that the man was an agent in an international network of sex traffickers, supplying vulnerable girls and young women to be sexually exploited in foreign brothels. In the border town Johor Bahru, Malaysia the trafficker sold Panida to a local brothel owner who preyed primarily on young, foreign women.

Panida was told that her employer paid an enormous sum (\$1,250 - \$2,000 US) to transport her, and that she must reimburse him with money she would earn selling her body to the brothel's many customers. Panida would have to service 5-10 customers a night in small "short-time" sex-booths for 100 RM (\$25 US) or would be farmed-out to customers for the full night at their hotel for a slightly higher price. If Panida failed to meet her quota or tried to refuse a customer, she risked being beaten and abused. The brothel owner would keep careful account of Panida's earnings, and if she did not also concede her tips the "captains" would withhold her food and Panida would not eat.

Once purchased, Panida was immediately locked in her new living quarters—a house crowded with other trafficked victims (7-9 women per room), complete with a constant guard, barred windows and doors that locked from the outside. Panida was told that she would spend all her off-hours locked in this room like the other brothel workers. She would routinely sleep from 5:00 AM to 3:00 PM, eat only two meals each day and then be shipped to the brothel for sex work in the afternoon. Panida was never permitted to leave or to even stick her head outside the window. Here, Panida waited for her first night as a prostitute and the "destruction," as she described it, of her virginity.

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* In order to protect the individuals IJM serves and those who carry out the work, faces of sex abuse victims and particular IJM investigators have been blurred. To further conceal the identities of victims and safeguard ongoing IJM casework, pseudonyms have been used though the accounts are real. Actual names and casework documentation are on file with IJM.

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After a few days at the holding-house, Panida and the other women and children were brought under guard to the brothel. What they didn't know was that International Justice Mission investigators had been working months in advance to infiltrate the trafficking system that bound them. In a remarkable turn of events, on the very first night Panida was to be prostituted Malaysian police, prompted to action by information provided by IJM, raided the brothel. Panida and several other young women and girls were brought out and immediately placed into police custody beginning their road to freedom. After a series of police raids, 95 young women and girls were rescued. Panida's rescuers arrived in time so that Panida was never prostituted, protecting the virginity she cherished before her abusers could steal it from her.

When IJM met Panida at an immigration detention center in Johor Bahru, Malaysia she was distraught. She was extremely homesick and afraid that her mother, whom she had intended to help, was additionally burdened with fear for her safety. All Panida wanted was to return home and start school again.

An IJM caseworker contacted Panida's mother in Thailand. Panida's mother was extremely distressed and explained that months earlier she had filed a missing persons report with local authorities, fearing the worst. After a protracted search she believed her daughter was dead. Daily she would travel, in her emaciated state, to the local spirit house with food as an offering for her daughter's soul.

The IJM caseworker informed Panida's mother of the good news, that Panida was in fact alive and had been released from detention. She had already been repatriated and was ready to be picked up in southern Thailand as soon as the mother could get there. Panida's mother again became deeply troubled and explained that she could not afford the travel expenses from the north of Thailand to the south to retrieve her daughter.

IJM paid the cost to reunite Panida and her mother and to sponsor the child's education, a cost that neither Panida nor her mother could pay. With IJM's help, Panida is home again under her mother's care in Chiang Rai and completing the 9th grade.



Panida's mother signs legal documents in the process of being reunited with her daughter.



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