

Victim: The Child Maid

Shyima was a little girl when she began working for a wealthy Egyptian, Abdel-Nasser Youssef Ibrahim, who moved from Cairo, Egypt to Irvine, California with his family. At age ten she spent long days ironing, cooking, and laundering. In exchange, she received \$30 a month and slept in the non-descript garage of the family's fancy five bedroom home. Shyima was forbidden to use the household's washing machine for her own clothes, which she cleaned in a bucket. During a trip to Disneyland Park she was the designated valet, who carted the luggage, and didn't get to ride the rides.

For Shyima there was no opportunity to play, learn, or be nurtured. Just like Cinderella in the fairy tale, who labored as a scullery maid for mean taskmasters, it was all drudgery.

An anonymous tipster contacted the Orange County Child Protective Services about the child who lived in the garage, and Ibrahim was busted by local law enforcement. Shyima was placed in foster care and, eventually, found a real-life Prince Charming - in a caring American couple who adopted her. Today, she aspires to a career at Immigrations and Customs Enforcement and has no contact with her own family in northern Africa. Ibrahim and his wife, who pled guilty to charges of "forced labor and slavery," were sentenced to a federal prison and

deportation. The court also ordered the couple to pay back wages to Shyima.

John Miller of the State Department estimates that of the 700,000 or so individuals that are trafficked yearly across international borders, half of them are children. They are sold into sex slavery, factory work, farm labor, conscription, and domestic servitude. Back in Cairo, Shyima's illiterate parents had signed a contract with a maid recruiter "leasing" out her services.

Shyima's former 'employers' had figured out how to game the system well enough to lie to embassy officials and sneak her into the United States, via a visitor's visa. They asserted to the Irvine Police Department that she was a distant relative. Unlike countless other immigration imbroglios involving illegal entry and human trafficking, in this case, justice prevailed. Shyima's sad memories, however, will likely never fade.

*Izzy Lyman is the editor of the **Victims of Illegal Immigration.***