

## Down the Rabbit Hole – episode #4 – Rita's story

[Anon voices] Empathy Museum presents A Mile in My Shoes.

[Three voices, speaking different parts of the sentence in turn] From Boldface and Women in Prison – this is Down the Rabbit Hole, a series of letters and personal stories from three women who access The Beth Centre in London. That's Rita and Elizabeth, and I'm Angel.

[Rita]

My name is Rita. I have 56 years old. I'm a black woman. Activist for Black Lives Matter. And I'm an artist. I'm a mother. I'm from Brazil. I grew up with poor family but a lot of joy, a lot of love. A lot of music around me. Some girls have a problem for, you know, to be a black or to be poor. I never have this problem because my parents give me good guidelines for that. They make me feel stronger for many obstacles in my life. When I was 10 years old, my dad have asthma, and he's paralysed and he's fighting for survive. This problem in my family makes me feel stronger for everything.

I was dancer. I was actress in musical theatre. I was MTV presenter. I was 23 years old and MTV launched in Brazil for the first time, but they don't have black presenters. And they choose for two black presenters. I put my name in an application and I remember one other guy asking to me: Rita, what you bring for us different than we have in the company? I say, ah, I bring for us my culture. I bring my culture for MTV – Samba, Jungle, and talk about, you know, my roots. And it's an amazing time.

I remember exactly what happened in that time. I have everything. I'm celebrity, have money, everywhere when I go, people recognise me, open the doors. It's a dream come true for one young girl, you know.

But one day I'm lost. I lost the best job I have my whole life. Now, I think for racism. Can imagine it: the second black presenter on MTV in Brazil, and talk about Malcolm X, talk about Marcus Garvey, I talk about Martin Luther King... That time, in the nineties, people didn't know anything about racism, and I talk about this on MTV and then I think people would stop me. This is why I lost my job, because of racism's way.

I lost my job when I was 27 and one day I discover I'm pregnancy. To be a mother is a good experience in my life, good experience in that time for me. Everything's transforming in my body and I forget for the job, I forget for the, you know, I'm a normal person. And that time I come back to my parents' house. My parents support me a lot. I discover another relationship with my mum, is completely different because my mom is very, you know, protective, obsessive. She's demanding. And this is the time I leave for the house when I was 17. When I come back to it, 27 years old in pregnancy – I saw her completely different, you know, I saw her my best friend.

I have a Lucas and then, when I was 35, I have another pregnancy. I come to the UK and 20 years ago just for my kids' education. For black boys grow up in Brazil is quite difficult for survive. Police kill them, or they go in the bad way, you know, gangs or trafficking, and then I don't have money for pay his education in Brazil. His education is so expensive. And my ex-husband say, no, we want to go to UK because education's free, you know, is much better for the kids. So this is, I come to UK.

16th of November. I come to UK, in 2000. And they say, oh, four o'clock is the night, I say, no, I'm not gonna stay that place. You know, four o'clock in the afternoon is a night? No. But I'm staying here for 21 year now. I love London. This is my home.

Five years ago started my problem. Me and my ex-husband split up. We have a divorce, but he's no pay my divorce agreement. He's saying to me he's bankrupt and his company. Every year I go to visit my dad, and that time I'm in Brazil, he called me and say, now I don't have the money for paying you. So I don't have money for come back. And I pass one and a half year in Brazil for make money for come back to UK. And that time he's was my guarantor and my rent house. He's finished my contract. When I come back one and a half year after, I don't have a house to live. And I have a problem in my both knee, I can't walk properly. So I'm stay homeless for five years without a house, without a job.

I have some few friends and I say, can I stay you at your house for exchange? I cleaning, you know, I care for your kids. I cooking and I care for the house and I'm a good housewife. The five years I live look like that. When I move sometimes to the place is so funny because people don't want I'm leaving – no stay here! No, it's nice! You stay! So I make good friends. I go to, I make a family, you know, and then I come to Women in Prison last year.

So Women in Prison supported me, resolved my problem because they put me in a hostel, and then later on introduced to me that house I'm stay there. Just for me, my own toilet, my own kitchen. You don't need too much, you know, just the one place you sleeping, you cooking, you know, your own bathroom. Is good. You know, I'm so happy for that. You have a chance for transform your life.

I'm discovery another Rita, you know. My letter is about I talk to myself, you know, because when I was a child, we think when you arrive in fifties, you're completely old. But no, I have both again, solving my problems. I survive. And, uh, I realise I'm so strong when I, you go to suffering and deep pain, you come back to illuminated, you know? So I think this is happening with me. and I think I'm win, you know? My daughter is finished university this year. She's strong. She beautiful. She clever. Lucas, my son, he's amazing. He's amazing. Good friend. When I look at them, I say, yeah, I think I made a good job.

[Anon voice]

This episode was produced by Jesse Lawson and Nada Smiljanic. Down the Rabbit Hole is a 10-week workshop series and podcast produced by Boldface, in collaboration with Women in Prison.