

## Ali / 37

Ali is an asylum seeker and gay rights activist facing death threats for his work...

*[Ali is sitting in a darkened room by a window, we do not see his face in full throughout the film]*

I was born in Iraq, and raised, and lived most of my life in Baghdad. I knew about my sexuality since a very early age. Personally I've never had any experience of being persecuted for my sexuality under Saddam's regime. But I have a little bit difficulties with the regime when they tried to recruit me to spy on my foreign diplomat partner. I was very young, and we felt in love. I alerted him, and he just disappeared.

They said he didn't end his mission suddenly, out of the blue, for no reason. 'Explain that.' And I couldn't explain; and I ... after ... you know ... a little bit of... roughing up and beating up and torture, I said everything.

I went through medical treatment and then I had to go back on the job again. I was doing things just to keep my family alive, because from day one they made it clear to me; you make a mistake, your parents, your family, and even your cousins will be erased. I was on that service for almost nine years. Between 1991 until 2000, yeah, when I managed to escape.

To be an asylum seeker is a very difficult struggle and a very hard journey. I'd been advised and asked by my solicitor to look through reports on my home country to do my asylum statement. I started to look for reports inside Iraq and late 2004 I knew about some of my friends who were burned alive in the streets of Baghdad because of their sexual identity.

I gather information, I gather testimonies from eyewitnesses; more and more and more incidents, almost the same, and others of incidents of people who were arrested, beaten up, harassed, since 2004 until this day. And we start a campaign, we launch a weblog, with the help of Outrage and with the help of some of my friends here in London, and in the UK, we formed a small group and we started to do press releases.

Unfortunately because of the work I am doing right now, I started to get hate messages, threats, and even death threats. By email, by phone. Some of these threats came from Iraq, some of them came from within the UK. The threats tended to become more physical when I had people trying to break into my house here in London. I had to move house. I have to move often. I was lucky to have the Metropolitan Police by my side until this day, and I consider myself blessed by God, saved by God on many times.

And it always now comes to my mind when I think about victims that have been killed and gone in Iraq, and I always try to capture what they were thinking the last seconds of their life, because I've been there. **I had people pulled a gun on my head and shoot, next to me, threaten me, telling me that, 'You're dying, say your last prayer', and I did say my last prayer.**

I mean I'll tell you about just last night, I had somebody was standing for 20 minutes, shouting at me, screaming at me, and telling me all the names in the book. I felt very sorry for someone who is so angry, so hatred, full of hatred, and... I'm just fascinated by how people can be – can have hate within themselves. For someone they do not know, and they may never meet again. We're in this planet together, and if we have to live, we have to live together.