

Chantal B. Dana

the True Story
of

Maris Davis Joseph

I SPEAK ABOUT ME (*WITHOUT FEAR*)



"I look the horizon, but I try infinity"



I SPEAK ABOUT ME (WITHOUT FEAR)

When I was a child, in the suburbs of Benin City, I dreamed that father faher would stop beating mom who was his second wife. Till today In Nigeria polygamy is allowed . Mom endured just to feed us.

9 brothers and sisters, 5 from first wife and 4 from second wife, and my mother (second wife) had to take care of everybody, even of children that are not hers.



An **Angel**, my granthmother, took me away from that hell. If not for her I would have been subjected to the owful practice of infibulation (cut of the clitoris) like my sisters. This great woman paid for my studies till the bachelore (in Nigeria you must pay even to attend compulsory school).

After graduation I was dreaming to go to Europe, so my father, in order to make me happy, **“SOLD”** me in for a few dollars to some “smart” and well dressed gentlemen who brought me to Italy (1995).



First city Turin, and those *“smart gentlemen”* took me by force and, in the presence of my first Madame, raped me (many times for tree days), saying that I've got to learn the job. I wasn't 21 yet.

1995 - 1997: Remebering is painful. In front of my pavement there was always the "queue", I was young and cute, and I learned italian very fast, not as well as now, but I could make me understood. When the madame realized that I've got to many italian friends they sold me to another group of smart nigerians and they took me to another city .. so I had to find new friends. The debit I had to pay to those "*gentleman*" was **60 tousand dollars** (a huge amount).

So from Turin to Verona, then to Padua and then finally to Udine. I was tired and depressed, I didn't care any longer if they threatened my family in Nigeria, I no longer cared about my life...

1997: My customers often spoke to me about Caritas and other organizations (as Don Benzi). I wanna die, but before dying myself, I want to take my revenge with those bastards... just tree days after my arrival in Udine I asked to a *“good client”* if he knew teh addres of Caritas, so he took me to Via Treppo.

The sweetness of a lady, the goodness of a cop, and some other Nigerians I found there, persuaded me to denounce all the madames and all those smart getlemen. It had been a harrowing week because they made me

remember everything, with all the numbers of my mobile phone address book (mostly clients) put under control.

1997 - 1999: I lived in a so-called Casa Protetta with others girls, almost all Albanians. But immediately at Caritas noticed that I was graduated at the secondary school and that I was able to attend University. They gave me the documents and enrolled me with a fake name: Chantal Blessing Dana. So I became **Chantal B. Dana**, name especially dear to me. For two years I had attended the Faculty of Computer Science, without skipping a test, as any other model student. None of my classmates never suspected anything about my past, I was just a nigerian girl who comed to Italy in order to study. My residence permitt hadn't been relased because I collaborated with justice but just for "Study".

At the beginning of 1999 I knew a man who was about 40, friulian, who had just splitted from his wife and that was living alone. But I did not want any relationships with men, he knew everything about me because he was a volunteer at Caritas, and he had a particular focus on me so we swapped our phone numbers, and sometimes we had a beautiful time together (speaking).

Maggio 1999: One day, as every morning of that spring, I was on the bus, going to university at Rizzi. I went down at the usual stop in Cotonificio street and wile I was walking a car pulled up next to me, and before I could cry or ask for help I ended on the backseat... They tied my hands and my feet, and put a hood over my head. **Nigerian mafia found me...** The next day I already was in Girona, in Spain. Till now I wonder how they did, maybe one word with a nigerian friend that, maybe for money, betrayed me.



What I know is that starting from that moment I was back to hell. My italian documents torn with anger in front my very eyes, my mobile phone thrown violently against the wall of the room where I was locked up, all my stuff (dresses, shoes, photos, ecc...), all my firend, everything still in Italy, in that time I had nothing left, just the hits of "*those gentlemen*" and my tears.

1999–2003: I don't want to remember, but... The difference between Italy and Spain, were that in Spain, rather than the road, there were the night clubs, the partys, the client's houses, and so on... and then even the women, the home movies, they obliged me do the most owful things because they knew that in Italy I made complaints. I wasn't allowed to go out (alone), I had to work exclusively in closed places... were they could easely checked over me. Every single day I wanted to die, but every single day I saw a light,

that light had been my **hope** for four years.

From Tenerife to Ibiza, from Valencia to Barcellona, and at least Madrid. Unfortunately I was very requested, I was tired and depressed but nobody, neither one customer never showed mercy on me. At the end of 2003, I was the stand in of myself, always sick and feverish, I was reduced to a rag that wanted to close his eyes... forever!

And so one day "*those bastards*" said that my debt were payed, and abandoned me at my destiny. So ill put I was non longer usefull for their goals, I was become a burden even for them. All of a sudden I ended without a place to sleep, nor documents, just a suitcase with all my life inside plus 700 euro that I managed to hide.

Lukily a merciful hand (a friend) hosted me in her room that she rented from a nigerian family in Alcalà de Henares (abuot 30 km far from Madrid).

2004: The years of the attacs. The 11 march, one of the two exploded trains at the station of Atocha (in Madrid) had left from Alcalà de Henares. A train of Cercanias de Madrid that I taken countless times. Almost 200 killed and many wounded, more than two tousand.

But that "tragic" event for Spain slipped on me like something I don't care for, I was depressed, spending my days closed in that little room sleeping or staring at the ceiling. My father were dead since two years, but I had also broken relations with Mom, brothers and sisters.

It comes the summer, and I bought a second-hand sewing machine, remebering that as a girl I learned how to made dresses and mending.

One day, while I was searcing trough the little stuff of my suitcase, I found a little diary of some years before on wich thers still written an italian mobile phone number and next to the number there were a name: Florindo. I bought 5 euro credit and caled that number and with my greate surprise someone answered, it was really him that, thank goodnes, had not changed his number trough the years. That light I've been seeing so far (**hope**), since that day start to change direction and the dream to start living again became closer and closer.

We spoke two or tre times per day, I start to smile, to go out, I went back to the church, and above all resumed contact with my family in Nigeria.



On 15 august of that year at 9 o'clock of that morning Florindo called me and said: "*I've just left Udine, tomorrow on early morning I should be in Madrid, be ready*". Two tousand kilometers of car, alone, he drove for 23 hours almost without sleeping, a madness made just for me. Our first met took place at the station of Atocha.



On October Florindo came back (this time by plane) and rented a flat just for me, in the rooftop of a building of five floors. It was new and very great, three rooms, three bathrooms, livingroom, kitchen and two endless terraces plus the swimming pool in the garden. Everything for me .. but I'd never forgot about that merciful hand, that friend that hosted me when I had nothing .. and invited her to live with me in my new home.

2004–2006: It takes almost three years to obtain again my Italian documents through the Italian consulate in **Madrid** (Nuevos Ministerios) where I've always found smart people, years through which even Florindo obtained the divorce, years through which I underwent a surgical intervention as a result of the many past violence. Now I could no longer become a mom, one of the many indelible marks that "those bastards" left me. An episode that I lived peacefully because next to me there were that man I love and still love.

Years in which, with that rickety sewing machine, I managed to build me up a clientele that appreciate my dresses and my work as seamstress. This way I earned my first real money.



On **27 ottobre 2006**, at the Comune di Parla (Comunidad de Madrid), I and Florindo realized all our dreams of love and got married. It had been a quiet unique marriage; a Nigerian one born in Sierra Leone marrying an Italian one in Madrid .. Think to the fun we had obtaining all the requested documents, we drove crazy the Italian consulate and the commons of Udine and Parla, with certified translations and documents in three languages (Italian, English and Spanish). But in the end all went good and we made a great party. Now, I laugh thinking about it .. wonderful!

About a month later I finally came back to Italy, in Udine, in the same city from which, more than seven years before, a bunch of "*human beasts*" taken me by force and made me "*disappear*".



But now Chanty was back and first of all she would start again from where she had been interrupted... I began to study again, I had all the tests I need to graduate the bachelore (November 2007). A document that for me has a special meaning, that goes over the graduation.

2010: It tooks more than six years of serenity, of loving care, of continuous prayers to find the courage to tell, to trow away all the pain I've been hiding inside for so long . It took me a journey to Canada to put pen to paper a story that cuold be a plot for a film.



Even years after, it happens that I'm attacked from unpleasant remembers, all of a sudden I wake up in the middle of the night, but then I strech my hand and stroke the face of the only man able to give himself to me without asking something in exchange. My “**The One I Love**” ...

The one I Love – R.E.M.

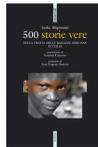
<http://www.youtube.com/dbflorindo#p/f/6/VfGJWxga3M>

Abuot this topic, two books I suggest, stories like mine, that is “**Trafficking of Nigerian girls**” made slaves from unscrupolous mafious organization, scornful abuot the dignity and the freedom of people.



Le Ragazze di Benin City

http://www.melampoeditore.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=69%3Ale-ragazze-di-benin-city-&catid=35%3Alibri&Itemid=1



500 Storie Vere

<http://www.ediesseonline.it/catalogo/materiali/500-storie-vere>



Mai più Schiave

<http://emi.it/schede/1799-2.html>



Spezzare le Catene

http://rizzoli.rcslibri.corriere.it/libro/5335_spezzare_le_catene_suor_bonetti_pozzi.html



The text of this "*biography*" was agreed with my husband, and once again he realized that I really need to break free, sure with some difficulty (*4 months to write 5 short pages*), but finally that "rock" that was inside came out and now I feel "lighter", still not completely free from thoughts but proud of myself and without fear because I finally realized that all that bad that happened to me was NOT my fault.

If anyone thinks I did it to help other girls, he's wrong, I did it for myself. All those who are now living this nightmare, may find strength and courage to denounce, it's the only way. To all those Nigerians who dream of Europe say: "*Do not trust no one*". And even fewer I look for "compassion". My present is a Heaven, and is what I've always wanted. The past is behind me ... Now I have reached My dream ... and I'm living it!

The account on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/MarisDavisFoundation>), the photos. I put on the site, maybe are just a way to return a child, or to prove that I'm still young, or maybe just to say to myself, before anyone else, that I'm still cute. Or just a way to leave positive messages to the world of Internet, of Hope, of Faith, and Courage ... witnessing my personal past. On Facebook I have met many amazing people, friends that otherwise I would never know.

This story will have an impact? Yes, almost certainly, people near me (friends, work colleagues, in-laws, maybe the neighbors, etc...) will now be able to know. Someone knew a little, many do not know anything, what I say to all: "Know that I am and always will be the Maris you know, I'm not changed, moreover I got rid of a weight and now I'll be even better. What is important for me is that you know that Florindo knew everything from the start, and if this years he has been discreet, it was only out of respect for me. "When we meet wink at me without saying one word, I'll understand that you still continue to love me".

Maris Davis (August 2010)

English translation from the italian original document curated
by Michele Nilgessi for "*Foundation for Africa*"



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